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MISS BLANCHARD OF CHICAGO.

VOL. II.

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Miss Blanchard of Chicago

BY

ALBERT KEVILL-DAVIES,

AUTHOR OF "AN AMERICAN WIDOW," "MARRIAGE UP TO DATE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MISS BLANCHARD OF CHICAGO.

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CHAPTER I.

VIOLET AND THE RECTOR.

THE next three days formed a period of unbroken misery and suffering for Violet. It seemed as though no one would leave her alone in her grief. First of all came the coroner and his jury, and before these she was on the rack for over an hour, answering questions, and having her wounded heart stung in a cruel manner. At one time they seemed to be trying to show that her mother had committed suicide; at another, that the deceased had been suffering from melancholia and insanity; and at another, that the unfortunate lady had been masquerading under an assumed name, and

that Violet must know the cause of such an action and the actual identity of herself and parent.

“ You recollect nothing of your father, I believe ? ” the coroner asked towards the close of Violet’s very trying examination.

“ Nothing, ” was the brief reply.

“ You don’t know what part of the country your mother lived in before she came here, or where she was married ? ”

“ No ; I was a baby when she came here. ”

“ What was your father’s name ? ”

“ My mother’s name was Mrs Carlisle ; I am Miss Carlisle ; my father, therefore, must have been Mr Carlisle. ”

“ Of course. I beg your pardon, but I meant his Christian name—his full name. ”

“ I don’t know. We never talked about him. ”

“ You have some family papers, perhaps, somewhere ? ”

“ There is a box of them somewhere ; but I really don’t know where. In London, I think. ”

“ At your family solicitors ? ”

“ I don’t know. I know that mother kept them in London. ”

“It would have been well if your solicitor could have attended here. Has he been informed of your mother’s death?”

“I don’t know who he is. I have never heard her speak of him.”

“But don’t you know who attended to her affairs or received and paid her monies?”

“No; all her money came from the bank, and she generally kept a large sum in the house.”

“You don’t know the source of her income?”

“No. I know that she had investments at the bank; but what, I don’t know. I believe I have some, too.”

“And you don’t know any one who knew your father?”

“No one.”

“Has no one ever spoken to you of him?”

“We never saw any one here. We lived entirely by ourselves. The only friend I had, besides my mother and Martha, is in America.”

“Who is that?”

“Arthur Vallance.”

“Did he live near you? Did you meet him here?”

“Yes, he lived at Redwood House. He was a nephew of Mr Allen Redwood.”

“Oh; do you know any other members of the family?”

“No.”

“I don’t wish to annoy you, but may I ask how you became acquainted with him without knowing any of his relatives?”

“He was upset in the river in front of the house, and I helped him out.”

“Was that long ago?”

“Nearly two years, I should think.”

“And he has been a visitor at your house ever since?”

“Until he went to America.”

“When was that?”

“About a fortnight ago.”

“And you can throw no light whatever on the whereabouts of your mother’s relations?”

“None. I don’t know that she had any.”

“You have no idea as to her reasons for coming and living here in complete isolation—for cutting herself off from the world?”

“No; but, if she had lived, we were going into the world a little next week. We were going to London for a few days.”

“On business?”

“No; to let me see London. But she had promised to tell me something when we got there—some important secret, I think.”

“You have no idea what that was?”

“No; it was, I am sure, something concerning us, something, perhaps, painful to my mother; but I shall never know now.”

Then the coroner, thanking her for her testimony, and saying that it gave him great pain to have been obliged to detain her so long and ask such inquisitive questions, allowed her to go.

At the end of the inquiry, which elicited nothing to gratify the curiosity of the village gossips, the jury simply found a verdict of “Accidentally drowned,” and the coroner gave his certificate.

But Violet’s troubles and mortifications were not ended here, for she soon found herself again under a form of examination quite as painful as that at the inquest. No sooner had this business been concluded than the rector of the parish in which River Lawn was situated, called, and insisted upon having an interview with Miss Carlisle. After uttering a few words of sympathy, this gentleman turned abruptly to the business which had brought him.

"I have received notice," he said, "that your poor mother is to be buried in our churchyard, and that you wish the funeral service to take place there."

"Of course," replied Violet, looking at her latest tormentor with a puzzled expression. "I suppose it is customary to bury people in the churchyard nearest where they die."

"Quite right," responded the parson, glancing uneasily at the dust on his boots; "but it is my duty to inquire to what religion your mother belonged. You see she never attended church all the time she lived here, and she persistently refused to see either me, my wife, or my curate. Now, if she was a dissenter, I cannot read the service, though the law gives her a right to be buried in the churchyard. That I am obliged to allow."

There was a slight aggressiveness and a tendency to reproach in the clergyman's manner that jarred upon Violet, and instantly created a feeling of resentment within her. It was evident that, in his eyes, to be a dissenter was an unpardonable offence.

"I don't know that it makes much difference, where a person is buried," she replied, "or what is said at the ceremony. I, myself, would be quite willing to bury mother in

the garden, where I could see her grave at all times. Mother was far too good for it to make any difference to her where her body is laid, or what is said at her funeral."

"But, my child, she ought to have attended church. But that need make no difference, if you will tell me that she was a member of the Church of England."

"I cannot tell you so, for I don't know, and I don't see what her belief can have to do with the burial of her body. Does the churchyard belong to you ?"

"No, certainly not ; but I am its custodian, as it were, and it is not my duty to read the service over unbelievers."

"My mother was not an unbeliever," the girl cried indignantly, rising from her seat and facing the reverend gentleman. "She was a true Christian, and very much better than many of those whose religion consists of a certain number of attendances at church each week, and of nothing more."

"Don't be angry with me, please, my child. I am obliged to consider these things. Do you know in what religion she was brought up ?"

"No, I don't ; and I don't see that it matters."

The clergyman could not refrain from smiling at the girl's extreme candour. There was a freshness and a *naivete* about it, that compared almost pleasantly with the monotonous civility of many of his parishioners and the servile adulation of others. He was so great a power in this well-priested village that he did not often meet with such genuine frankness as he found in this young lady.

"I had no intention of meddling or prying, but it was my duty to ascertain your mother's religious belief before I performed the burial service over her," he said, apologetically.

"I can't understand that myself; it seems so bigoted and small. But it is a matter of no importance, for I am sure it can make no difference whether you read anything over mother on not. And, as for me, as I said just now, I should like to bury her in the garden, where she would be always near me."

"My poor child, you are almost a heathen."

"You are very rude to say such a thing. I am just as much a Christian as you are, only I don't parade it. I don't wish to talk about it any more."

"Do you wish me to officiate?"

“ You must please yourself. The spirit of my mother is free ; it has left her body for ever. What good can it do to her living spirit to have a stranger read a prescribed formula of prayers over her dead body ? ”

“ You are far too young to entertain such doctrines as these, or even to understand the question you would raise.”

“ I am old enough to have my own opinions.”

The clergyman pondered in silence for a few moments. He could see plainly that it would be useless to attempt to convert the girl at present ; therefore he said,—

“ I will not discuss this with you now. Perhaps, some day we may have an opportunity to revert to it again. But, about the burial service, I will think it over.”

Then he extended his hand to Violet to bid her good-bye. Just at that moment, however, his eyes fell upon a book on a small table, and his outstretched hand changed its course and picked up the volume. It was only a Church of England Prayer Book, handsomely bound, and having two heavy brass clasps.”

“ This does not look as though you had been a family of unbelievers,” he said, evi-

dently pleased as he opened the book and scanned the title-page.

“Why; this book has been with you over twenty years. Who was Violet—you?”

“My mother’s name was Violet. I believe that book was given to her by her aunt!”

“Yes; quite likely. The inscription reads—‘Violet, from her loving Aunt,—and the date is about twenty years ago.”

“I don’t see anything wonderful about it. Perhaps you would like to examine all the other books we have?”

“Don’t you see, Miss Carlisle, that the presence of this little prayer book on your table settles all the difficulty in regard to the funeral service, and that my conscience now leaves me at liberty to officiate at the last rites of your poor mother.”

“How so?” she asked, not quite comprehending the sudden change in her visitor’s tones and manner.

“Because it proves to me that your mother, after all, was one of us. Her aunt would not have given her, and she would not have accepted, a prayer book if she had been an unbeliever or a dissenter. She has, it is true,

been culpably careless about attending church, and greatly to blame in her conduct in excluding us clergy from her house, but she is fully entitled to our services."

" You mean," asked Violet, dryly ; " that the presence of a 'Book of Common Prayer' in our home entitles my mother to be buried like a Christian instead of like a heathen."

" We won't put it that way. I was anxious to ascertain that she was really a member of our church, and I have been fortunate enough to discover that she was. None of my parishioners can raise any objection now."

" Did they ever object ? "

" Well, there was some little gossip to the effect that you were not church-going people, and perhaps had never been baptised. I see, though, a little memorandum in this book which appears to record your mother's confirmation, shortly after the date on which her aunt presented her with it."

" Are people about here really so small minded that they will fight over the disposal of the dead, and quarrel about who shall have the privilege of being laid in the same soil as their own sacred bodies ? "

“Well, you see this is a very orthodox parish.”

“What’s that?”

“A parish composed of people who almost all conform strictly to the doctrines of the Established Church.”

“And who believe in the evil of every woman who is not within their circle, and who does not shape her belief according to their tenets?”

“Oh, no, certainly not; but there are certain beliefs—”

“Yes, I daresay there are, but I don’t care for them. My mother was better than all your goody-goodies, although they seem to think she was not fit to be buried in the same land where their own bodies will eventually go.”

“Oh, no; it was not a question of the ground; that is settled by law in favour of allowing all sects the same privileges. It was a question of the service.”

“A question as to whether it was fit that the same parson who ministers to their holy selves should officiate over her. I think that is quite as bigoted. But really, you need not do it. I don’t care, and I’m sure she wouldn’t.”

“But,” said the clergyman, holding up the prayer book, which he still held in his hand; “this book has effectually settled the controversy. I am going to officiate myself.”

He spoke with a self-satisfied complacency that fully indicated how great an honour he believed his condescension bestowed upon the living daughter and the dead mother.

Violet regarded him with wonder depicted in her face. To her he was a curiosity. He did not appear to be void of a certain kind of good-nature, nor did he appear to be quite lacking in sympathy; but his better qualities seemed to be submerged beneath a rigid austerity, a supreme self-esteem and self-righteousness, and an autocratic, dictatorial manner that would have done credit to a preacher of the Cromwellian era.

“I am much obliged to you,” she said, simply, and then added, “are all clergyman like you? I have read of High, Low, and Broad Churches, of Ritualists and Evangelists —which are you?”

“Why do you ask that question?”

“Because you talk as if you held, not only the key of your parish church, but also the key of heaven. Just now, when you said ‘I am going to officiate myself,’ you spoke as

if you were opening the gates of heaven to my dear mother. You spoke as if you were St Peter in disguise."

"You are a funny child," he said, smiling kindly in spite of the trifling wound his vanity received from her words. "But I daresay we shall be better friends some day. If I can do anything more for you, pray send down to the Rectory."

And then he took his departure, his face glowing with self-satisfaction as he thought of the appropriate little lecture on jumping too quickly at evil conclusions which he would inflict on a certain elderly spinster who meddled much in parish affairs, and who had been the first to discern that Mrs Carlisle was not a Christian.

CHAPTER II.

VIOLET'S NEW FRIENDS.

THERE was no more difficulty about the funeral service over Mrs Carlisle. The rector announced to those of his parishioners who had interviewed him on the subject that their insinuations and conclusions had been unfounded and uncharitable, and that, having fully satisfied his conscience in the matter, he intended to do that which he knew to be right.

And this the reverend gentleman did, for although he generally listened to all that his numerous parish councillors had to say on parochial affairs, and allowed his ears to receive all the various bits of gossip and scandal which his wife and her little staff of church whippers-in collected from time to time around the neighbourhood, he never permitted any actual interference with his

authority, or any criticism of a course to which he had already made up his mind.

So Violet's mother was laid to rest in the pretty village churchyard, and the young orphan herself returned with Martha to the lonely desolation which now prevailed at River Lawn.

Two or three ladies, including Mrs Harlow, had volunteered to come and stay with her for a day or two, but Miss Carlisle had begged them to allow her to be alone.

Up to the present moment no one had broached the subject of her future plans, and she herself had not, as yet, thought of the necessity of making any.

This necessity, however, was forcibly brought to her mind by Martha, who, on the evening after the funeral, informed her mistress that it was time now to be thinking of what they were going to do.

“ You see, miss,” she said plaintively, wiping the tears away from her eyes; “ we can't stay here by ourselves.”

“ Why not? ” asked Violet.

“ Because, miss, a young lady like you can't be left to grow up wild in this 'ere place, alone with an ignorant woman like me. That would never do. It would set all them

prying gossips shaking their heads and wagging their tongues at us. Besides, there is something else, miss."

"What?"

"Well, miss, I haven't got over that terrible night, and I couldn't remain in this house now. I'm afraid for my life to go to the windows on that side to shut the shutters, and now as the blinds must be up again, I daren't do it. You see, miss, the place will be haunted for ever now."

"Martha, I had no idea you were such a coward. I always thought you so faithful. Supposing there were such things as ghosts, could you be afraid of the ghost of one who had been so good to you as mother had?"

"It isn't that, miss. All spirits and ghosts are alike. They ain't fit company for us earthly folks. I ain't afraid of any man or woman as was ever born; but when it comes to ghosts, miss, my courage is all gone. That's the solemn truth, miss. I shall go mad if I stay here a few more nights."

"Then you propose to desert me in my trouble?"

"No, miss, I won't desert you, but I propose we get out of this house as soon as possible."

"But where are we to go? We have no other house."

"There's only one thing to do, miss, that I can see, and that is for you to take a little house somewhere else, and take me and a companion to live with you."

"A companion?"

"Yes, miss, you can't live alone, at your age, with no one but an old servant. And you oughtn't to stay here, miss, for the people are full of spite and mischief making."

"What have they said, now?"

"I'm not going to tell you what they say, but there's some of 'em as do nothing but preach and blacken the characters of people who are better than themselves."

"Do they blacken my character?"

"Yours? Oh, no; they don't do that. Even they can see as you are too young and innocent to be a target for their tongues yet."

"Then you mean they attack my mother?"

"Well, they do say things which no one ought to say, and which are not true."

Very well, Martha, we will leave the dear old home, and we will go away. It's better to go; it will never be a home again now mother is gone. I don't care much where we go. It's very funny there is no friend of

mother's to come and help us and advise us. We were very happy, but very friendless. I wish we could go to America to Arthur."

"That wouldn't do, miss."

"No; besides I don't know his address yet. I ought to hear from him soon."

"Some day, miss," said Martha, who thoroughly enjoyed a little bit of romance, "you'll be going out to him to be married, or he'll be coming over here to fetch you. Then, miss, you'll be happy once again, and you'll live in one of those marble palaces the papers write about, and you'll have your own little children playing around you."

Violet made no response, but looked gloomily out of the window at the gap in the bushes from which Arthur Vallance had been accustomed to emerge, and then from that her eyes wandered to the spot where she and Martha had stood on that fateful night on which her mother had fallen over the cliff.

In the morning things took a very unexpected turn, and Violet was surprised to see a fly drive up to the front door of River Lawn, and still more surprised when she observed a gentleman and lady alight from it and enter the house.

“They’ve come on business, miss, they says,” exclaimed Martha, as she entered Violet’s room, “and I’ve put them in the dining-room to wait till you come down. Shall I ask them what their business is, and where they’ve come from?”

“Yes.”

Martha disappeared, but returned in two or three minutes with the information that they had come on business in regard to herself and her dead mother, and that they had come down from London.

Then Violet descended the stairs, and, entering the dining-room, found herself face to face with a bald-headed, smooth-faced, little man, carefully dressed in the latest London fashion, and a portly, middle-aged matron, whose garments indicated a state of widowhood.

The former laid his shiny silk hat carefully upon the dining-table, and extended a gloved hand to the young lady.

“You do not know us, Miss Carlisle,” he said, in a polite, deferential manner, “so we must introduce ourselves. I am Joseph Knox, and this is my sister, Mrs Yorke. Having been friends of, and done business for, your poor mother, we have come down to look after you, and help you to arrange your affairs. I

cannot say how much I sympathise with you in your great trouble."

"Nor I," said the portly matron, advancing to Violet, clasping the girl's face between her hands, and kissing her affectionately. "It is far too sad to speak about."

Violet, however, resented being hugged and kissed by a stranger, and drawing herself up to her full height, she said,—

"I would rather you didn't do that, please."

Then she stood by the table waiting for them to say something more. Herself, she felt embarrassed and ill at ease, and had not the remotest idea what to do or what to speak about.

Meanwhile, Mrs Yorke stealthily surveyed her, looked her up and down from head to feet, and noting with admiration the girl's great brown eyes, that seemed now to speak volumes of sorrow, the masses of curly black hair, the clear, pale complexion, and the prettily curved mouth, which, although it occasionally twitched with pain and grief, showed unmistakable tokens of resolution and temper.

"Poor, dear child," remarked the widow, after she had completed her scrutiny, and come to the conclusion that the slim figure

before her, clad in such sombre mourning, the pale face presenting a marked contrast to the jet black hair and black dress, was destined to develop into a very beautiful woman ; “ excuse me if I was a little forward. I feel so sorry for you. You know I knew your mother, and I once promised her that I would look after you if anything ever happened to her.”

Violet turned her eyes full in the speaker’s face, and regarded her with an inquiring look that betokened just a shade of mistrust. But the woman’s countenance was open and frank, and she only smiled when she saw that the young lady was taking mental notes of her. That smile dispelled any doubts that existed in the girl’s mind, for she said,—

“ It was very kind of you to come down from London on purpose to help me. I am very lonely and miserable.”

“ Of course you are,” replied Mrs Yorke, “ after having lost your poor, dear mother. But we must try to do something for you. I think it will be best for you to come to town with me at once, and remain at my house for the present. Then we can arrange all your plans, and my brother will look after your affairs. He is a solicitor.”

Violet’s thoughts reverted to the time, only

a few days ago, when she and her mother had decided to go to London, and the recollection brought tears to her eyes. She soon choked them back, however, and, turning to Mrs Yorke, asked,—

“But how can I go to London and leave my dear old home here to take care of itself? How can I go and live with strangers?”

“You mustn’t look upon us as strangers; you must remember that your mother and myself were old friends.”

Again Violet’s eyes looked searchingly and almost suspiciously into the woman’s face; again some indefinable instinct appeared to create doubts in her mind as to the truthfulness of this statement about the friendship.

“I never heard my mother mention you,” she said.

“No, I daresay not,” was the prompt reply. “You see it is a great many years since we met. I knew your mother when she was a girl. I was older than she was.”

“I should think you were,” was the rejoinder, sounding somewhat rude to the lady’s ears, though not intended to do so; “why, my mother was only about thirty-three.”

“Was she really so young as that? I had

forgotten her age. She must have been a mere child when she married."

"I don't think she was much older than I am now."

"No; I am sure she wasn't. And she used to look very like you."

"Did you know my father?"

Mrs Yorke appeared for a moment not to have heard the question, and seemed to be lost in a dreamy contemplation of the little bit of landscape visible through the window from the corner in which she was seated. Presently she said,—

"No, I never saw him. I never saw her after her marriage, until after his death. I never knew anything about him, except that he married your mother and died."

"I have no recollection of him myself. I believe I was a tiny baby when he died. I have been fatherless all my life, and now I am motherless too."

"Poor girl! I feel so sorry for you, and what little compensation my friendship can give, it will."

"You are very kind, but no friendship can ever compensate for the loss of a mother like mine."

"I think we had better come to business

matters," broke in Mr Knox. "I am obliged to return to town this afternoon, and I must really effect some arrangement here before I go."

Then, directly addressing Violet, he said,—

"I daresay, Miss Carlisle, that you would like Mrs Yorke to remain here with you until you are ready to come to town. I am sure she will be very pleased to do so. How long will it take you to get ready—till to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" cried Violet in dismay, "go out of here to-morrow? leave here altogether to-morrow?"

"Not altogether, unless you like," replied Mr Knox, persuasively. "You will be able to come back any time you wish, but your presence in London will be necessary for some little while. It is far better, too, that for the present you should be separated from a place which must always have such painful associations."

"Yes," chimed in Mrs Yorke, "that is quite true. Tear yourself away from here for the present, my dear, and it will be better for you. It is high time that you saw something of the world, and seeing the world is always the best antidote for sorrow. Besides, there is another

very serious consideration, and that is that it would never do—it would be quite impossible—for a young girl like you to remain here all by yourself with only a servant. Such a thing is out of the question."

"But what is to become of the dear old home?" asked Violet.

"I will make all arrangements about it," answered Mr Knox. "I will put in a caretaker to look after it until we can let it. It will soon let ; it is such a beautiful little place. If there was any shooting to go with it, I could get rid of it at once. Besides, I think your lease has almost expired."

"I don't know anything about that," she replied ; "mother always attended to the business affairs."

"And now, I think, we had better collect your mother's papers and have a little look over them, to get an idea as to the condition of her affairs. I suppose you have them?"

"No ; I have looked through her desk, but there is nothing there except house accounts, and a bundle of bank notes."

"No papers or letters at all?"

"Not any."

"But she must have had some private

papers somewhere. Of course you know where they are kept?"

"No, I don't. I know she had some, but where she put them I don't know."

"Perhaps at her bankers?"

"I think not, although she has money and some shares there."

"It is very odd. Do you mean that there are really no private papers in this house?"

"I am sure there are not. My mother was very reserved, and never left anything about."

"We must write to her bankers. They are the National Provincial in Gloucester, I think?"

"Yes."

"I will communicate with them at once, and ascertain what securities and balance they hold for her, and if they have a will or any other papers."

"Thank you! If you were her solicitor, surely, if she had made a will, you would have known? She couldn't have made it by herself."

"You can't tell that, Miss Carlisle. Ladies of late have developed as keen a taste for acting as their own lawyers, as

they have for dabbling in politics. Don't think I am running them down. I am not. To a great extent they are safe in doing so. If a woman wishes to make a simple will, leaving everything to her child or children, instead of paying a solicitor a couple of guineas for drawing it up, she merely consults *Whittaker's Almanack*, and writes it out according to the form and directions she finds therein. A lady client of mine recently died, leaving twenty - two wills, all carefully drawn up and properly executed. The entire twenty - two had been made within six months, and each one of them would have been perfectly valid, except for the existence of its successor. The latest one was probated without the slightest difficulty."

"But didn't she tell you she had made a will, or consult you about it?"

"Never mentioned a word about it. Was afraid I would charge a consultation fee, I suppose. Every woman her own lawyer was her motto, though she had to come to me sometimes."

Then Violet, turning to Mrs Yorke, who had remained silent during the conversation about wills, inquired what was to become of Martha if she herself went to London.

"For the present," replied Mrs Yorke, "she may as well come with you. I dare-say you would not like to part with her at once."

"No, I would not like to part with her, though she said she could not stay here."

"Why?"

"Because of my mother's ghost. She is afraid of it."

"Afraid of your mother's ghost?" ejaculated Mr Knox in astonishment.

"Yes," said Violet, in her simple, truthful manner. "Martha was with me on the cliff the night that mother was drowned, and she is afraid now that this place will be haunted. She is quite stupid and obstinate about it."

"I think I will go and speak to her," said Mrs Yorke, "and explain our presence here, and our plans, to her. Perhaps you and Mr Knox could talk business better without me. As soon as you have done, we will all help you to get together everything you wish to take with you. I will sleep here to-night, and to-morrow we will go to London."

Violet acquiesced. It seemed to her perfectly plain that she must leave River Lawn

at once, for not only was she in a perpetual state of restlessness, not knowing what to do with herself, or how to get through the days, but there was the difficulty about Martha to urge her into a speedy departure. If she remained, her old servant would certainly leave her, and how could she live alone in an isolated place like this? Indeed, how could she live there under any circumstances, with no one but a servant for her companion? There was no help for it; all the ties which bound her to the dear old house and grounds must be snapped, as death had snapped the bonds of love and companionship which had bound herself and her mother together.

After all, the links between herself and River Lawn now were only those of memories and past associations, for even when Arthur had gone to America, the solitude of the place had palled on her and distressed her, and now that her parent had passed away for ever, she realised that very soon life there must become perfectly unbearable. So it only took a few minutes to reconcile her to the idea of leaving, though, when she gazed out upon the lawn, looking so bright and beautiful in the mid-

day sunshine, and recalled to mind the pleasant dreamy days passed there, feelings of anguish and desolation completely overwhelmed her, and she rushed from the room to her bedroom, and locked the door behind her, leaving the solicitor to entertain himself as best he could.

An hour later she emerged from this seclusion, and was soon busy pointing out to Martha all the various things she wished to take to London.

The servant's satisfaction was great indeed when she learnt that they were going to leave the next day, and she worked with an untiring vigour and a cheerful will that performed wonders in the task of packing, and caused everything to be ready for removal long before the fly came round to take them to the station.

So speedily had all the arrangements been completed, and so suddenly did Violet's departure take place, that it was not known in the village till after the baker had called, and found the house shut up.

CHAPTER III.

VIOLET TRAVELS.

THE novelty of a railway journey did much to draw Violet out of the gloom and sorrow in which she was wrapped. So far as she could remember, it was the first time in her life that she had ever been in a train, and the continually transforming scenery, together with the strange sensation of whirling past villages and small towns, diverted her attention from her grief, and caused her to look out of the window with the first expression of real interest in her face that Mrs Yorke had yet observed.

Never before had Miss Carlisle seen so much of life as she saw travelling from Gloucester to London, and every place, every incident, every person, attracted her attention, and interested her. All this girl's ideas and knowledge of the world were drawn entirely from the books and papers

which she had read, and never once had they been aided by an object lesson.

The train on which this little party of three journeyed, was one of those comfortable expresses which ignores the existence of all the smaller stations, and rushes through from Swindon to London without even condescending to stop at a town of such importance as Reading. It seemed to Violet almost incredible that in so brief a space of time she could have been transferred from that far away little nook on the riverside, to the great bustling capital of the world, and when they arrived at Paddington, she clung to Mrs Yorke's arm, and stared in amazement at the hurrying, jostling crowd which blocked the platform.

Every one seemed so eager and busy, and everything appeared on such a gigantic scale, that she was almost appalled, but the great metropolis fell off a little bit in her estimation when she took notice of the dirty stuffy "growler" into which Mrs Yorke pushed her. That at least, she thought, could not compare to the flies that were used in the neighbourhood of River Lawn. The drive through the streets, however, soon dispelled any little dis-

pointment on account of the vehicles, and her interest was once more aroused to its utmost, in observing the shops and houses that were to be seen on the way to her friends' home.

The direction which the cab took, plainly intimated that Mrs Yorke, at all events, was not a fashionable woman. The driver did not turn his horse's head towards Mayfair or Belgravia, nor did he guide the jaded brute across the park in the direction of South Kensington, but he drove straight to Bayswater, and pulled up at a small detached house in one of the streets leading out of Westbourne Grove.

"Here we are," said Mrs Yorke, quite cheerfully, as she worked her portly figure out through the cab door, and then turned to assist her young *protégée*. "Here we are at last. It is a tiresome journey, and I am dreadfully hungry."

Then she hurried up the steps, rang the bell, and before the summons could be answered, the "growler" in which Martha had followed them also arrived, covered with luggage.

There was nothing particular to recommend it in the dwelling into which Violet was

ushered by her hostess. The rooms were medium size, very clean, and very comfortable, but absolutely devoid of anything artistic or calculated to please the eye. Both furniture and decorations seemed to be plainly stamped "*Bourgeois*," and any person accustomed to judge a woman by her surroundings, would at once have put down the occupant of this establishment as a homely, middle-class person, without much pretension to style, and totally deficient in every kind of culture.

If, though, she had no artistic tastes or appreciation of the beautiful, it was very evident to Violet, as soon as they sat down to luncheon, that her hostess had both taste for, and appreciation of, a well-cooked repast, for nothing could have been nicer than the manner in which the meal was served, and a highly-paid French *chef* would not have been ashamed to own to the superintendence of its career through the kitchen.

After luncheon was finished, Mrs Yorke showed her young guest over the house, and begged that she would consider herself entirely at home by making use of anything and everything that she wanted.

"I want you to feel perfectly at ease," she said, fondling the girl's hand, "and not

to feel under restraint in any way. Always do just what you feel like doing, only, of course, you must not go out into the streets without me. Young ladies can never go out alone in London."

"Why not?" asked Violet, looking rather surprised at the interdiction.

"Because it isn't safe for them to do it. Indeed, there are a great many reasons why it is impossible. Why, if a pretty girl like you were to be wandering about the streets alone, she'd be kidnapped. Indeed, the most dreadful things might happen. Never go out without me."

Violet pouted. She liked Mrs Yorke—as much as she had seen of her—fairly well ; but the idea of having to accept her as a perpetual companion, to be tied, as it were, to her apron-strings, was far from comforting. It was a severe trial, indeed, to have to substitute in the place of a refined and affectionate mother a commonplace specimen of middle-class feminine domesticity ; but she resigned herself to the position for the present, finding some consolation in the knowledge that she could bring her visit to an end whenever she chose.

"I suppose, then, there is no place where

one can sit in the shade or lie in a hammock like at River Lawn?" she asked.

"No, indeed, there isn't," answered Mrs Yorke; "but we can go and sit in the park and watch the carriages, or we can go and walk in Kensington Gardens sometimes."

That little monosyllable "we" irritated Violet, and chafed her mind like a chain might have chafed her skin.

"Don't people have any independence in London?" she asked. "Wouldn't it be proper for me to sit and watch the carriages by myself?"

"Good gracious! No, my dear child, no. That would be worse than going out on the street by yourself. But don't fret yourself. You and I will get along very well together, and I shall be able to find plenty of things to interest you."

"I suppose if Arthur were here I could go out with him?"

"Who is Arthur?"

Violet looked hesitatingly at Mrs Yorke before she made any reply. Again some vague mistrust of this woman's sincerity and truthfulness flitted through her mind, and some subtle instinct whispered "Beware."

"He is my dearest friend — my only

friend," she answered, after a pause of about half a minute's duration. "I think I have already spoken about him."

"He is very young, isn't he?"

"He is older than I."

"He need not be venerable to be that. But a young lady of your age could never be allowed to walk out with a young man. Only servant girls do that, and I never allow even my servants to have young men."

"Then, when Arthur comes back from America, I shall return to River Lawn, where he and I can be together as much as we please."

Mrs Yorke was genuinely surprised at this frank declaration of a purpose to defy all the proprieties, and could not help marvelling at the curious combination of innocence and resolution which was to be found in this young lady's character. She assumed a good-tempered smile as she said,—

"Really, your guilelessness is quite fascinating. Surely you don't think it would be proper for you and this young man to be alone together at River Lawn?"

"Martha will be there, of course," replied Violet. "I can't help being alone when I

have no father, no mother, no brother, no sister. I used to be with Arthur a great deal when my mother was alive. I want him more than ever now she is gone. What was proper then is proper now."

"Do you write to him in America?"

"I shall as soon as I get his address. I haven't had time to hear from him yet, and when I said good-bye to him, he didn't know the name of the place he was going to. I expect to hear every day now. Then I shall have to write and tell him all, and I shall ask him to come back to England."

"America is a long distance away, and American women are said to be very fascinating; though, for my own part, I don't admire them at all. Englishmen do, though, and a boy like this is sure to be captivated by one of them in no time."

"You don't know him. He is not that kind of a boy. He will always be true to me."

"If you want him, I hope he will," the widow answered in a softer tone; "but you are very young, and liable to change your own mind. When you have seen a few town men your ideas about this country lad may change."

"How do you know he is a country lad?" asked Violet quickly.

"From what you have said. You said he lived near you."

"I never called him a country lad. He has been in London lots of times, and he went out to America all by himself."

"Still, you know, he cannot be called a man of the world yet, nor even a great traveller. And boys of his age are notoriously fickle."

"Well, we shall see. It is no use to talk about him to you, because you don't know him; and I daresay you think people don't know anything about the world until they are middle-aged. Some persons never give those much younger than themselves credit for knowing anything."

Mrs Yorke's face assumed a wounded expression. This was the second time that Miss Carlisle had hit upon a tender subject, and had almost hinted that her friend was not so young as she really believed herself to be. Considering how anxiously the widow scanned her face every morning for traces of wrinkles, and how carefully she managed her toilet, artfully concealing any hairs that were changing colour, it was not to be won-

dered at that the word “middle-aged” sounded unpleasantly in her ears.

She abruptly diverted the conversation into other channels.

Mrs Yorke was what might be termed a “local-minded” woman, the pivot round which her mental faculties revolved being centered in Bayswater. What Hyde Park corner is to the inhabitants of Mayfair or Belgravia, Westbourne Grove was to the buxom widow; what the grandest shops of New Bond Street, Regent Street, and Oxford Street are to the fashionable woman’s world, Mr Whiteley’s vast emporium had long ago become to her; the *Bayswater Society Herald* was her *Morning Post*; second-rate concerts at the local halls constituted her principal diet of public entertainments; and the dinner parties, balls, and receptions to which she received invitations were always given by neighbours living within a radius of half-a-mile.

Now, however, that she had a young lady to live with her, she came to the praiseworthy resolution to wander further afield than hitherto, although, of course, her *protégée*’s age and deep mourning precluded her from being taken to any such amusements

as dances or the like. After exhausting Bayswater, she intended to give Violet a glimpse of Greater London.

And very soon Violet found herself settling down into a quiet, regular style of existence, which, if not remarkable for its liveliness, was, at all events, spiced with a certain amount of variety. She soon discovered that Mrs Yorke was not a difficult person to get along with, although, at times, she did find her a trifle wearisome, and not always as refined as she would have liked. Mr Knox visited them frequently, and Violet had a good many conversations with him in regard to moneys, stocks, and administration of property, which she did not understand in the least, but to which she was compelled to listen.

The change from country to town had undoubtedly benefited her much; and for a time both her spirits and health appeared to improve. Sometimes, it is true, she gave way to feelings of gloom and despondency, and at other times she would fret under the influence of a certain strange sensation that her freedom was curtailed, and that she herself was, in a measure, a prisoner; again, during the latter, being imbued with the

same vague mistrust of her hostess as had first impressed itself on her mind at River Lawn; but, on the whole, her life ran smoothly enough, and she did not experience any very strong desire to return to her country home.

As weeks elapsed, however, and she received no letter from Arthur Vallance, her spirits began to droop in earnest, and she grew more fearful every day that something evil had befallen him, or that, perhaps, he had been lost at sea. Every time the postman's ring was heard, she would keep her eyes fixed on the drawing-room door until the servant had answered the bell, feeling sure each time that the long-wished-for letter had arrived; and then, when it became certain that it had not, she would become doubly dejected, her mouth twitching convulsively, and sometimes a tell-tale moisture appearing in her eyes, the latter being kept by sheer force of will from maturing into a flood of tears.

Several times she appealed to Mr Knox to make inquiries if a letter from America had not been received at River Lawn, and this the lawyer had promised to do, and afterwards said he had done, informing her

that no letters of any kind, except two or three bills, had gone to her home since she left. These had been forwarded at once on their arrival, for he had exercised great care in giving directions about the letters, and there was no doubt that if any others had come she would have received them. So there was nothing for it but to wait with as much patience as she could muster, and this she did, growing paler and more silent every day.

The widow was astonished at the effect wrought in her guest by the disappointment and anxiety which the girl was undergoing, and could hardly realise that such a young heart could be so deeply touched, or so persistently faithful. Hitherto, even in spite of her deep grief at the loss of her mother, there had been a certain amount of animation and no little originality about Violet that had made her a pleasant companion ; but now she would walk beside Mrs Yorke for half-an-hour at a time without opening her mouth.

At last she grew to look so ill and pale that Mr Knox and Mrs Yorke decided she must have change of air and scene, and Switzerland was fixed upon as the most desirable place for the recruiting of her health. To this she

made no demur, and arrangements were at once commenced for the journey.

As soon as this step had been decided upon, Violet wrote a short note to Mr Allen Redwood begging him to tell her if his nephew had arrived safely in America. It was a plaintive little letter, merely saying that she and Arthur had been friends, and now that she had lost her mother, she had no other friend in the world but him, and beseeching the uncle to say if his nephew had reached his destination, and to send her his address. The days rolled slowly by, however, and no answer came, and Violet was soon compelled to admit to herself that this last appeal had failed.

Then she took Martha completely in her confidence, and told her of the misery and disappointment she was undergoing.

“It’s my belief, miss,” said that woman, closing the door of Violet’s room, and speaking in a voice pregnant with mystery, “as there is something underhanded going on here. I am an ignorant woman, and the little learning I’ve picked up ain’t of much value, but something tells me that there’s deceit and knavery carrying on, and they don’t commence and end with the servants.”

“Do you mean Mrs Yorke?” asked Violet, in a whisper.

“She’s the one I do mean, and that little lawyer chap is her pal,” was the sturdy response.

“But what do you think they are doing? Mrs Yorke is very kind and always seems anxious to do everything she can for me.”

“Yes, miss, I know she is; but I don’t take kindly to her nevertheless. She seems to me to be deceitful. May be she’s got an eye to your money. Don’t you ever sign anything, miss. They might get you to make a will leaving all to her, and then murder you.”

Now, Martha, you are talking nonsense, and trying to frighten me. A girl under age can’t make a will or dispose of her property in any way.”

“I’m very glad to hear it, miss. Perhaps, then, its only for the sake of the money you pay for board and lodging for yourself and me that she wants to keep you.”

“I daresay it is a very great help to her, and very likely she is glad to have me for a companion. I have no fears of any injury being done to me. I shall go abroad with her; and when I come back, whether I shall stay or not I really don’t know.”

"And am I to remain here until you return?"

"Yes; Mrs Yorke is going to leave the house in charge of you and Jane."

"Well, miss, it will be very lonely here, for Jane and I are not in love with each other as it is; and we shall not like each other any the better for being all alone."

"I would have liked to have taken you with me, Martha; but Mr Knox said that it would be such an additional expense. It seems odd, but he has so often asked me about some of poor mother's papers—if I can't remember some word or something to indicate where she put them. It seems that they are necessary before my affairs can be finally adjusted."

"Well, miss, it's my belief, if those papers are valuable, it'll be better he shouldn't find them until you are older."

"It isn't likely that he will find them now. He thinks it almost hopeless."

"He won't get any help from me; though, some day, they'll be found here in London. I remember the day when your mother came to London with a box, and I remember that she came home the next evening without it. When he finds that box he'll find what he wants; but if Mrs Carlisle had wished him to

have it, it's my opinion she would have given it to him at once, instead of hiding it away."

"Sometimes I am very much puzzled by all these things. First we live for years in such strange solitude, without even a friend or a visitor, and people avoid us as if we had the small-pox, or we avoid them as if they had it, I don't know which; then mother dies such a strange death, and just before she seemed so worried and anxious; then the coroner comes and asks me a lot of peculiar questions; then Mr Knox and Mrs Yorke drop down from the skies, say that they were old friends of mother's, and take possession of me; and, lastly, this loss of a box of papers, which Mr Knox seems so anxious to find. There is Arthur's strange silence, too. I can't make out why he doesn't write."

"He may write yet, miss; he may have been ill."

"I am losing hope, now. I wonder if any girl was ever in such a position before. A few months ago I had a mother and one friend. Now, I have neither. I am a friendless orphan, whom no one seems to know about or care about. Perhaps I shall feel better after I have been abroad and

seen a little bit of the world ; but I don't care now whether I live or not."

"Don't say that, miss. You may live a very happy life yet."

"It doesn't look promising. I seem to have grown up in such a funny way. I was always longing to see something of the world and of its people, and mother seemed to hate the very idea of such a thing. Kind and loving as she always was to me, she appeared to regard mankind as her common enemy. You know, Martha, you were always a sort of house-dog for her, to growl at and drive away any one who came near the place."

"Yes, I was. My mistress, poor lady, would have nothing to do with any one. Her whole soul was wrapped up in you."

"Indeed it was ; but the mysterious manner in which we lived puzzled me greatly ; and just when she spoke of telling me something important concerning us, she died, and the secret of her life was sealed for ever."

"You may learn it yet, some day, miss. As for me, she was always a good mistress, but she never told me anything about her affairs. She didn't even give me her letters

to post, but always walked with them to the letter-box herself. She didn't write many—sometimes not one in six months—but when she did write, I never saw so much as the address."

"Sometimes, Martha," Violet said, looking dreamily before her, and apparently avoiding the eyes of her servant, "I think that, perhaps, the meaning of it is that I am not myself—that I am some one else."

"Not yourself, miss!" ejaculated Martha. "Not yourself, but some one else! Whatever do you mean?"

"What I mean is that, perhaps, our real name wasn't Carlisle—that, perhaps, mother was living under an assumed name. I have often read of such things."

"I see what you mean. For a moment, miss, you made my flesh creep. I thought you were going to say you were a spirit, or had seen one. Well, it might be that, but I don't know. Your mother was a true lady, whoever she was."

Martha had no further remark to make upon the subject; and Violet, without saying anything more, turned her attention to a book which lay in her lap.

A few days later Mrs Yorke and her

protégée left London for the Continent, and after spending a few days in Paris, proceeded to Switzerland. No letter had come from Arthur Vallance; and as week after week continued to glide by, bringing no news of any kind, Violet Carlisle abandoned all hope of hearing from him, finally making up her mind that she would have to live without the friendship and love she had so prized. Then a restless, wandering spirit took possession of her, and the desire to see the world became so intense, that Mrs Yorke soon realised that she herself had dropped into the place of a mere subservient companion, and that Miss Carlisle, in search of new scenery and fresh faces, dragged her hither and thither without compunction.

CHAPTER IV.

A ROW AT SQUARE MILE FARM.

THE long dreary winter of the North-West passed away, the young grass began to cover the lands with a bright green hue in place of the monotonous glaring white of the snow, and, in the rays of the sun, there once more became apparent a feeling of warmth. The pupils on Square Mile Farm had all survived the cheerless existence concomitant with life in an isolated corner of the Far North-West during such a hard and trying season, but they viewed its termination in much the same mood as a gang of convicts at penal servitude might regard the breaking up of a lengthened period of bad weather which had compelled the suspension of work in the quarries.

To Arthur Vallance and his comrades the advent of spring and summer meant nothing more than a return to unrewarded hard labour ; the enforced and miserable idleness prevailing

so long would only be replaced by an equally obnoxious drudgery. The longer days, it is true, were heartily welcome, for the tedious evenings spent in that gloomy shed, which formed the youths' bedroom, had been one of the most trying and depressing features of the season. With only one dingy light from a strongly smelling lamp, without a book of any description to read, and having neither light, spirit, nor appliances to play games, these seven young men huddled themselves round the stove, and told stories and abused their instructor to their heart's content, noting with satisfaction, as each week elapsed, the gradual superseding by God's daylight of the foggy gleams afforded by Mr Emerson's cheap kerosene and thin wick. One and all denounced the life as wretched in the extreme, but none of them could devise any means of immediately getting away from it, for each one recognised the fact that he had been instructed for no profession and taught no trade, and that, therefore, to cast himself adrift without any means, and with such precarious chances of obtaining employment, would be to invite certain destitution and probably starvation. The truth of that oft-made remark, that the most helpless and unsuccessful immigrant which

lands upon the shores of America is the hobble-dehoy son of the English gentleman, having neither scholastic, business, nor artisan qualifications, fully impressed itself upon Vallance and his companions, and hard as their present life might be, it had, at least, the merit of affording them food and shelter, a fact which they all recognised when discussing their unpleasant situation.

During the winter there had at times been considerable friction at Square Mile Farm, Mr Emerson more than once finding himself defied and affronted by one or other of his students. This insubordination he attributed to a large extent to the influence of Arthur, and his affection for this young man was not by any means increased on that account. He hated him, but his hatred could not overbalance his avarice, and therefore he would not think of getting rid of so profitable a pupil; to a certain extent, too, he feared young Vallance, but his fear only led him to picture to himself the day when he should have the lad at his mercy and settle accounts to his own satisfaction.

The two Summers's, also, were down on his list for retribution when a good opportunity offered. He had searched secretly in every

quarter for Vallance's revolver, and on one occasion he and his negro cook had suddenly seized the youth from behind and ransacked his pockets for the weapon, but all to no avail, for he had never found it, and was able to form no idea as to its hiding-place. Consequently, he lived partially in dread of the most recent addition to his list of pupils, for he felt that the spirit and courage of this one, so far from being broken or subdued, had only increased and developed to an extraordinary extent by oppression. In fact, he pictured Arthur as a savage dog, which could not be muzzled, and which some day, in a fit of disobedience, might assume the attributes of a wild beast, and make a desperate attack on him. He knew that, if he chose, he could easily take him a prisoner, and lock him up for as long a time as he liked, but then he remembered the threat about burning the place down, and nervously reflected that there were two or three of the boys quite capable of executing it, if he should employ such a summary proceeding as confining their leader.

The easiest solution of these difficulties would have been to request Mr Redwood to remove his nephew at once, but then that

would have meant the relinquishing of a clear hundred pounds a year, and the loss of the unpaid labour of an able-bodied young man—the deprivation of the services of a strong and healthy male slave. To such a sacrifice as this Mrs Emerson would never have given her consent, for she had gone out to the North-West for no other purpose in the world than to make money, and possessed little scruple as to how she made it, so long as she did make it.

She fully realised that her husband's method of running a large farm must occasionally have its unpleasantries, and, perhaps, even sometimes be attended with a slight risk, but these were mere trifles compared with the pecuniary success which rewarded his schemes and perseverance. The principal fault she found with Mr Emerson's management of affairs was that, now and then, he seemed a little timid, and was reluctant to resort to the heroic measures which she herself believed necessary to the maintenance of true discipline.

The manner of keeping the pupils in subjection, which recommended itself to her mind, was very much after the pattern of that used by the slave-owners of the South,

in the palmy old days when negroes were personal property—on a level with mules and oxen.

Arthur had long since given up, in despair, all hope of ever hearing from Mrs Carlisle or her daughter, and the disappointment which he suffered on this account had tended to make him more reckless and headstrong than he otherwise would have been. The only bright spot in his existence seemed to have disappeared when it became clear that there was to be no further communication or relationship between himself and Violet, and the bitterness which entered into his soul became more and more visible in his daily conduct.

His comrades saw him growing harsher and more discontented, while, physically, he was developing into a stalwart and muscular young man, hardened by strenuous labour and constant exercise. He was rapidly changing from a boy to an adult, and, with the splendid physique which he was obtaining, it was evident that he would be unusually powerful and big.

Mr Emerson had at last come to the conclusion that an underfed labourer is about on a par with an underfed horse,

and that the maximum value of the work of either man or beast can only be secured by keeping him in good condition, the result of this very sensible conclusion being, that the fare doled out to the pupils at Square Mile Farm was very much superior in quality to what it had been when Arthur first arrived. But, if food for the body was more plentiful and better, food for the mind was as scarce as ever, and the lives of all of these lads were as unintellectual as it was possible for lives to be. Their reason seemed to be growing stagnant; their natures hardening day by day.

Occasionally, while out with the cattle in the evening, when a sinking sun would be casting golden and reddish tints over the vast surrounding prairies and over the distant forests in the North, the peaceful calm which prevailed throughout would creep into Arthur's troubled soul, and bring his thoughts back to a healthier contemplation of life. Then, at those times, some "still, small voice" would whisper to him of a higher future, and of unseen glories, and he would become temporarily tranquil and softened.

Then, too, the love which was not dead, but

only suppressed, would suddenly re-awake within him, and Violet as he had last seen her, Violet as he had known her when she was the one bright star of his dreary existence, would appear before him, stirring up hope in his breast, and dispelling the dark gloom which enveloped him. Then, too, those harsh and cruel doctrines which had been hammered into his brain when he was yet a mere child, and over which he had never ceased to ponder at intervals, would receive from surrounding nature and from instinct within him an emphatic contradiction. The very grandeur of the works of God, the peculiar peacefulness which now and then, whilst contemplating them, replaced his ordinary turbulent state of mind, spoke to him consolatory words of the improbability of such dire vengeance as his uncle always preached, and told him that all this beauty was not created by one who was savage and vindictive.

But unfortunately these moods and thoughts were only intermittent, though they indisputably did much to delay the process of brutalising through which the lad was passing ; they came into his hardening nature as gleams of a softening love and humanity, just as casual rays of sunshine penetrate slight breaks in the

clouds and momentarily illuminate the earth below.

Spring gradually matured into summer, and autumn, with its fading foliage and rapidly shortening days, followed on, but still Arthur found himself a farm pupil in North Dakota. He never heard now from his uncle ; all the correspondence that gentleman engaged in on his account was with Mr Emerson, and that was entirely confined to a letter every three months enclosing a draft for payment of the last quarter.

Three of the pupils had taken their departures, but four others had come in their places, so that the total roll-call now footed up eight instead of seven. The two Summers's remained, and were as friendly with young Vallance as ever ; but the latest additions to the establishment were all of more tender years than any of the others, the entire four ranging from the ages of twelve to fifteen. In case of a revolt on the farm they would not, as Fred Summers said, be of any great value.

Another winter came and passed, and long before it was over a resolution had been arrived at between Harry and Fred Summers and Arthur Vallance that they would leave together in the following spring, and would

take their chances of reaching a large city and getting employment. They had finally decided that the life was too intolerable to stand it any longer, and that their condition could not change much for the worse under any circumstances. As for Vallance, it was his intention to obtain work if he could, and then save up sufficient money to pay his passage back to England. Once in England, he thought, he would be able to ascertain the cause of Violet's strange silence, and he would also have the satisfaction of giving his relative a bit of his mind.

The days once more lengthened out, and the balmy air of spring again swept softly over the prairies. The time, they felt, was drawing near. Before taking the final step, each one had written home begging that this life of drudgery might be brought to a termination ; but neither of them had received an answer.

About this time the tempers of both Mr and Mrs Emerson appeared to undergo a considerable change for the worse, and the pupils were not slow to recognise the fact.

“Have you noticed how savage ‘Sal’ has got lately ?” Fred Summers asked of Arthur one day, when the two were out on the prairie tending cattle.

“ Yes ; but I can’t tell the cause, unless the old she-wolf is getting rheumatic,” was the reply.

“ Some disappointment in business, may be ; perhaps some pupils have gone astray.”

“ More likely some speculation or swindle they have been getting up has gone to smash.”

“ Emerson scowls so at us three, that every time I go near him I feel as if he were going to attack me. Do you think he can have found out about our last letters to England ? ”

“ I shouldn’t be surprised if my uncle sent him a copy of mine.”

“ And I daresay my step-mother intercepted mine and returned it to him without my father’s knowledge.”

“ Quite likely. Something has stirred the devil up in them, and I believe they are contemplating mischief. I’ve taken to keeping my revolver in my pocket again.”

“ That’s right. I’ve nothing but an old knife, but it might come in handy at close quarters. Where do you hide your ‘ shooter ’ at night ? ”

“ I’ve taken it to bed the last two nights.”

“ Look out they don’t snatch it. I think

we had better make a break as soon as possible now. The weather is quite settled, and summer will soon be coming on. If we only had a little money, we might risk it any moment, but such total destitution as ours, and the distance we are from anywhere, make strong prison walls."

"I should say they did. We will have to walk to Fargo."

"I suppose so. I would like to take his horses."

"We daren't. He could charge us with horse-stealing then, and we should get no sympathy if we were overtaken and lynched."

"I suppose not. Shall we decide to go to-morrow night if it is fine?"

"Yes; if Harry consents."

"Oh! he'll consent fast enough. Neither he nor I have a shilling. How much have you?"

"About twelve dollars. My uncle hasn't sent me any for more than a year; but I've kept that much from what I had when I came here, and two pounds he sent me the first winter."

"It'll be an awful shame for us to sponge on you; but I expect, after we've walked over forty miles, we'll want you to feed us,

unless some one will give us something out of charity?"

"I daresay we can get along. We won't spend anything when we can help it; but what I've got I'll divide with you both."

"You're a noble chap, and your uncle ought to be proud of you. Then it's settled we get away to-morrow night, and walk to Fargo."

"How about the moon? We ought to have her light to show us the way. Tramping forty miles of prairie in the dark is no joke. We should be sure to go wrong."

"The moon is five days old, but goes to bed early. Perhaps we had better wait till she has added on a few days more, and will stay up with us all night."

"I think so. A few more days won't make much difference."

That evening, after they reached home, they informed Harry Summers of their plans, and asked if he were willing to bolt in five or six days. The answer was a joyful affirmative.

"It is a risky thing for three chaps like us to launch ourselves upon the world without a friend and without money," he

said ; "but we will do it now. Nothing could be much worse than our present existence."

And so it was finally settled that in a few days they would steal away, under the cover of darkness, from Square Mile Farm, and walk to Fargo, whence they would endeavour to reach Minneapolis, and, if possible, Chicago.

Arthur was anxious to get to the latter, because he remembered Miss Blanchard's promise to help him if he were in trouble ; and he hoped that if he could see her, and tell her all that had happened, she might induce her father to do something for him. As to the two Summers's, they knew no one, and were willing to go to any place where there would be a fair chance of their getting something to do. Their greatest difficulty, they fully realised, would be reaching the more populous parts of the country. Here again Arthur was able to encourage his companions by asserting that he was sure if they could find Bill Maguire, that that obliging conductor would take them to St Paul free of cost."

A couple more days passed, during which these three young men availed themselves

of every moment they were together to discuss their approaching venture.

On the third evening, however, an incident occurred which caused their plans to be entirely forgotten.

The pupils were having supper under the superintendence of Mrs Emerson, when the head of the establishment walked in, and, remarking that his coat had been left at a spot about half-a-mile away, said that one of the boys must go and fetch it.

“Let Fred Emerson go,” said his wife.

“I’m hanged if I do,” was the prompt rejoinder from Fred himself.

“I’m hanged if you don’t,” replied Mrs Emerson, raising her gaunt frame from her seat, and standing at the head of the table glaring savagely at Fred.

“Well, then, be hanged,” was the curt and ready answer.

“I’ll stamp out this rebellious spirit in you,” yelled the woman, frantically, shaking her fist at the youth: “I’ll have no more of this milk-and-water policy in dealing with you. We’ve got instructions from your mother to deal with you in any way we think best, and I’m going to do it.”

“You can’t have any instructions from my

mother, for she is dead. If you have any instructions from my step-mother, who is nearly as great a she-cat as you are, you can put them in the fire."

"Keep calm, Sal," called out Harry Summers; "we are not going to fag any more to-night. Go yourself, or send the nigger."

"John!" re-echoed the irate woman, turning to her husband, who was standing near the door, scowling first at one and then at another of his pupils. "John! do you hear it? Are you going to stand still there while I am insulted? Call James and Gabe."

Her shrill tones, however, had penetrated through the building, and both her brother-in-law and the negro entered at the same moment.

"Seize those two," she cried, pointing to the Summers's; "throw them on the ground, and hold them down. I'll have them stripped, and I'll flog them with my own hands before I go to bed to-night. Yes, I'll flog them."

Both the Emersons and Gabe advanced to where the two Summers's were sitting; but Fred Summers nimbly jumped on the table, ran along it to where Mrs Emerson stood, and, seizing the knife with which she had been carving, jumped down to the floor by

her side, and brandished it in her face. At the same moment Arthur Vallance also leaped upon the table, and, quickly drawing his revolver, calmly took up a commanding position, and covered John Emerson.

“Stop, or I’ll shoot,” he cried. “Go back or you’re a dead man.”

Emerson’s attention had been concentrated on the elder Summers, but Arthur’s words and the glitter of the pistol instantly diverted it, and brought the instructor of farm pupils to a standstill. James Emerson also halted at the same moment. The negro, however, was not so fortunate in his movements, for he had already reached and thrown himself upon Harry Summers, only to receive a terrible blow on the skull from a heavy stone water-jug wielded by his would-be victim. A white man’s brain-pan would have crumbled to bits under such a blow, but Gabe’s skull was thick enough to stand the shock, although he fell to the floor like a log.

Then there came a pause, during which the other boys formed up in a solid phalanx, and confronted the enemy. Small and young as these were, they simultaneously showed their intentions of taking part in the affray, and joining sides with their comrades. Not one

of them hesitated for a moment, although two were little more than children.

Mrs Emerson had retreated into a corner, and was there kept by Fred Summers, who held the carving knife pointed at her in a menacing manner that completely unnerved her ; and, as she told her husband afterwards, caused icy chills to run down her back.

For a minute perfect silence reigned, Arthur meanwhile standing on the table, his pistol still being levelled at John Emerson ; Harry Summers holding himself erect and defiant, swinging the stone jug gently to and fro, as if waiting for some one to come within its reach ; Fred, facing Mrs Emerson, now cowed and intimidated, in the corner ; the five other boys ranged beside Harry Summers, some of them with fists clenched, the remainder with their dinner knives for weapons ; James and John Emerson near each other, a few feet from the table ; and the negro's huge form lying prostrate on the floor.

The first to make a decided movement was Gabe, who assumed a sitting posture, and gazed around him in bewilderment and surprise at the scene.

Arthur Vallance was the one who broke the silence.

"Let your brother and that nigger leave," he said to John Emerson, "and then we'll talk over this matter."

"Don't do it, John," cried Mrs Emerson; "they're wild beasts; they want to murder us as soon as they get us alone."

"Shut up, Sal," said Fred Summers, holding the carving knife a little nearer to her bosom, "if I wanted to murder you I could do it now."

The woman shrunk back in the corner, and said no more. The master of the house signified his assent to the proposition that his brother and his cook should leave the room.

James Emerson assisted the injured darkey to rise to his feet and slowly led him away. Then young Vallance told his fellow pupils to bolt the doors.

I won't be locked in here with all you murderers," screamed out Mrs Emerson, almost hysterically this time, "I won't!"

"Shut up, Sal," interposed Fred Summers, again putting the point of the knife a little nearer to her wriggling body.

"The reason I want the doors bolted is to prevent a surprise from those two we have just sent out," said Arthur. Then, turning

to Fred, as soon as the doors had been fastened, he added,—

“Let the woman sit down now, but keep your eye on her.”

Then he descended from the table on the side furthest from Mr Emerson and requested that individual to sit opposite to him.

At once there was a general stampede of the boys from one side to the other, so that the master found himself separated by the table from all his pupils.

“Now,” said Arthur, when they were all seated, “what do you intend to do about this? Is it to be peace or war?”

“I have never been for anything but peace,” was the sulky reply.

“Perhaps not, so long as we are content to be the most servile of slaves.”

“Britons never will be slaves,” sang Fred Summers; and then added, “I’ve slaved enough for you. I am the son of an English gentleman, and I will not do the dirty work of a howling cad like yourself. You are a cad and a bully, and you know it.”

“Coward, too, you might have added,” said Vallance.

“Well, what do you want?” asked Emerson.

“We want you to understand that we are

not oxen or niggers ; neither are we going to wait on you like valets. And we now want a written promise from you not to carry this matter any further, and never again to attempt violence. We also want a written apology from your wife for having dared to suggest such a thing as flogging."

"I won't give it," cried the woman ; "I'll never apologise."

"Yes, you will," said Fred Summers, "or we'll put you through a bit of flogging, yourself."

The idea of the gaunt and bony mistress of the place being flogged was too much for the gravity of several of the younger pupils, and there was a titter all down their side of the table.

"You're a crowd of young brutes," said Emerson, feeling terribly mortified at the turn of affairs, and at the idea that the youngsters could actually laugh during such a scene.

"Your establishment is undoubtedly calculated to destroy all human instincts," retorted Arthur, "but, nevertheless, we are not half as brutal as you and your wife, or we'd have burnt you out long ago, and left you both naked on the prairie. Take care we don't do it yet."

“Get your written promises ready,” said Harry Summers, “and let’s have an end of this business.”

“Boys, get Mrs Emerson a pencil and a piece of paper,” ordered Vallance, “and I’ll dictate her apology.”

Then the business was soon terminated. John Emerson wrote out a short paper in which he pledged himself to abstain from any further persecution of his pupils on account of the recent conflict, and also undertook never again to attempt to use force towards them. And Mrs Emerson signed a written apology for having grossly insulted her husband’s pupils, and for having suggested that they should be flogged.

“Let by - gones be by - gones,” said John Emerson, as he was leaving the room, “and let us go on as if this affair had never taken place.”

“All right,” answered some of the pupils.

Mrs Emerson made no remark; she strode through the doorway the very embodiment of malice and helpless vindictiveness, and shut the door with a bang.

“Amen,” said Fred Summer, when the boys were alone.

“It’s not Amen yet,” remarked Arthur;

"if ever a woman meant to be revengeful that one does. Boys, we must be on our guard. And one word to you smaller fellows. You all had better let Harry and Fred and myself fight this out alone, for we may not be here long, and if you take a hand you may suffer after we are gone."

After some further talk they resumed their seats at the table, and finished the interrupted meal, Fred Summers calmly taking Mrs Emerson's place, and acting as carver.

CHAPTER V.

A NOCTURNAL INTRUDER.

THE excitement and row of the evening did not prevent any of the pupils from sleeping on their hard beds as soundly as usual. After retiring to their shed they had, one by one, gone to rest, and dropped off into that intense slumber which is the only restorative for such physical fatigue as they regularly suffered every evening during the busy season.

By ten o'clock the dingy lamp had been extinguished, and darkness enveloped the room, the stillness of the night only being broken by the heavy breathing of the eight sleepers. Midnight came and passed, and the half moon had moved to an angle at which it was able to throw a thin streak of pale light through the long narrow holes which served as windows.

It had lately been the custom of the boys when they went to bed to place the heaviest boxes in the room against the door to prevent a surprise, there being no lock or bolt upon it, and the benches on which they slept being immovable, so that they could not guard themselves by having one of their number sleep across the entrance. This precaution had been taken as usual.

Towards one o'clock a muffled scraping noise sounded near the door, but it came too low and faint to disturb the weary lads. Every now and then, too, it would cease altogether, only to recommence after a brief interval. At no time did it sound as loud as the scratching of a rat, but there was a degree of cautiousness about it entirely foreign to the bold movements of the rodent. It had continued thus for some little time, when sounding rather louder than before, Vallance and the elder Summers moved uneasily in their beds, the latter giving vent to a deep groan. Something had disturbed them. Then came a profound silence, the scraping noise ceasing altogether.

Fifteen minutes later, however, the same low sound began again, but instantaneously with its resumption, Arthur moved restlessly

in his bed, and appeared to be waking. The next moment he was sitting upright, listening with rapt attention, and peering into the gloom. From his corner the door was just visible, and across the trunks which barricaded it he could discern a narrow streak of faint light caused by the moon's rays. After intently regarding this for several minutes, it dawned upon his mind that it was moving, not as it might move from the changing of the moon's position, but with an unsteady quivering movement; by little jerks and spasmodic jumps it seemed to be gradually passing off the boxes.

Without attempting to alarm his comrades, Vallance slipped his hand under the hard pillow, and grasped his revolver. Then he awaited developments. He was convinced now that some force from without was steadily pushing open the door in spite of the heavy boxes placed against it, and that the grating sound he had heard was caused by the scraping of those boxes over the floor. A clear half-an-hour elapsed during which the sounds died away altogether, and the moon sinking beneath the horizon, the shed was once more enveloped in almost total darkness. A vague sense of danger now pervaded Arthur, and he

was deliberating as to whether to arouse the others or not, when something seemed to move close beside his bed. At once reaching out for his matches, which were on a little shelf near by, his left hand came in contact with what he instantly realised was the head of a man crouching on the floor, and the touch of his fingers upon the hair told him that it was the woolly pate of a negro. Quick as a flash of lightning he drew back his hand, and, having his revolver in the other, without a second's hesitation, fired in the direction of the body he had touched.

The report of the pistol re-echoed loudly through the shed, alarming and arousing its occupants, and as it died away, a series of groans and oaths, and a body lurching heavily through the room were distinctly audible.

Several of the pupils struck matches and held their flickering lights up in the gloom. Fred Summers bounced out of bed, and lit the lamp. Then they all gathered round Arthur, who was now standing up in the centre of the room.

“What has happened?” asked several at the same moment.

“That nigger was crouched down at the side of my bed, and I fired at him,” said

Arthur. "I couldn't see him, so I don't know whether I hit him or not. I think I did, for I heard him groan and swear as he hooked it out."

"Let's examine things," said Harry Summers. "How did he get in without our hearing him?"

"Gradually pushed the door open, you see," answered Arthur. "Probably 'Sal' and Emerson helped him. I daresay they've been slowly pushing at it all night."

They walked to the door and noted its condition. It stood just sufficiently open to admit of the entrance of a large-sized man, and the trunks placed against it had been pushed back as far as it was opened.

"See here," cried Fred Summers, pointing to some red spots on the floor, "you hit him, that's certain."

"Yes; these are blood, right enough," said Arthur, after stooping down and examining them. "Well, I'm glad of it. It will teach them that we are not to be trifled with. They needed a lesson, and they've got it."

"What do you think he was after?" asked one of the younger pupils.

"His pistol," answered Fred Summers.

“They didn’t know until to-night that he had brought it out of its hiding-place.”

“They’ve got more of it than they wanted now, anyway,” said Arthur, bitterly. “I wonder where the nigger is hit.”

“Suppose you’ve killed him?” asked the youngest pupil in awe-struck tones, looking admiringly at the tall, athletic figure which still held the revolver in his hand.

“Can’t be helped,” was the reply; “but he didn’t go away like a dead man.”

“It’s odd ‘Sal’ or Emerson hasn’t come to see what the row is about,” said Fred.

“They’ll probably pretend they never heard it,” returned Arthur; “in any case, they’ll never admit that they knew of the nigger trying to burglarise our room.”

“Perhaps they didn’t,” said Harry Summers.

“I’ll bet they did,” answered Vallance; “but what shall we do now—barricade the door and go to bed again?”

“Yes,” came from three or four of the lads.

They shut the door and replaced the boxes against it, and then brought other trunks and portmanteaus, and piled them up also to strengthen the fortification, until the weight

which would be opposed to any one attempting to enter was so great that half-a-dozen stalwart negroes could not have made it budge an inch. After this they looked carefully in every nook and corner of the shed, and finding things satisfactory, once more betook themselves to their beds. Inexperienced, youthful, and unaccustomed to the rough-and-ready life of the West as they were, and not yet having acquired that disregard of human lives which is a characteristic of all those who reside long in these regions, nevertheless, they were all so weary and tired that they could have lain down and slept in the midst of very much greater dangers than those by which they were surrounded.

The younger ones tumbled in at once, and were fast asleep again in a very few minutes.

The two Summers and Arthur Vallance, however, restrained, for a little longer, their inclination to sleep, and held a brief consultation together.

“Things have reached the climax now,” said Harry Summers in an undertone; “we must clear out to-morrow night under all circumstances.”

“It seems an awful shame to cut and leave

these other chaps here," whispered Arthur. "They'll have to suffer when we are gone."

"It is a pity," said Fred ; "but we can't stay here on their account, and they probably wouldn't come with us, even if we could take them. We shall have enough to do to keep ourselves alive without carting away a whole troop of boys with us."

"No ; there's no help for it," answered Vallance. "They must remain and take their chances ; but still I am sorry to leave them to such a miserable life, and 'Sal' and Emerson will probably play the deuce when we are gone. By Jove ! and wont they have to work."

"Little Phillips is nearly dead from work now," remarked Harry Summers ; "he did as much to-day as a full-grown man ought to do."

"I never heard how he came to be sent here," said Arthur ; "he is so awfully small that it seems more than usually brutal."

"Same old tale," sneered Fred. "Mother died ; father married again ; step-mother had child of her own, and kicked first wife's child out of the country. The old, old story."

"I suppose it is, though it isn't mine. Well, then, it is agreed that we get out

to-morrow night as soon as everyone has got to sleep. For better or for worse, as the marriage service says, we betake ourselves from this place for ever."

"We do."

"We do."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WHIPPING-POST.

GABE did not call the pupils as usual on the morning following Arthur's adventure; but the master of the house himself performed that duty by hammering on the barricaded door, and yelling to the lads that it was time to be up.

The two Emersons looked glum and savage as they gave the directions for the morning's work, but they made no allusion to the occurrence of the night before, although the short, thick sticks, which they carried in their hands, and the butts of the revolvers, peeping out from their hip pockets, showed that they anticipated or intended hostilities. It was an anxious moment for the three youths who had made up their minds to run away, for they were in doubt as to whether it would be wiser to decline to do any more work, and to boldly depart

at once, or to struggle through this last day as best they could, and leave secretly that night.

The former course might, perhaps, lead to a conflict in which they would probably be worsted, while the latter was almost certain to result in a peaceful and successful departure. They decided, therefore, to go to their tasks as usual, but to keep a sharp look-out on the movements of their tyrannical masters. There was such a vast amount of work to be accomplished at this particular season that it was a fair conclusion to arrive at that nothing would be done, and no attack made on them, which would incapacitate them for duty for even a single hour. But in this, unfortunately, they did not give sufficient consideration to Mrs Emerson's malicious and vindictive disposition.

Two of the lads were directed to get their horses ready, and to take the cattle out to grass, while the others, except Arthur and Fred, were ordered to the corn field. In a few minutes all had departed, save Vallance and the younger Summers. The latter was sent to carry wood for the kitchen fire, while the former found the

duty of feeding what horses remained in the enclosure devolve upon himself.

Suspicious and ill at ease, but full of courage and defiance, Arthur went to the corn-bin and commenced to measure out the animals' breakfasts; but just as he was leaning over its side, with his head bent down, both his arms were tightly grasped from behind, and his body thrust forward over the bin. Before he had time to utter a word or make a struggle, he felt a hand quickly snatch his pistol from his pocket. Then a rope was swiftly coiled around his body, strapping his arms tightly to his sides, and he was turned round to face his captors.

They were Mrs Emerson, her brother-in-law, and Gabe.

“I think we will settle accounts now,” hissed Sal, giving him a stinging slap in the face, and making a hideous grimace at him that would have done credit to one of Macbeth’s witches.

“I’ll settle with you some day for that,” he answered defiantly, trying to wrest himself free.

“It will be some day,” she retorted with another fiendish grin. “We’ll see about that

later. I'll give you a course of discipline now that will break your haughty spirit."

Then, in spite of his struggles, they dragged him to a stall, and passing the rope which bound him through a halter ring, tied it securely, and left him. He at once commenced to yell lustily to Fred Summers to be on his guard; but the boy was out of reach of his voice, and was made captive almost as easily as he himself had been, for, although discovering their intention before they had actually secured him, Fred fought vigorously to escape, the odds against him were too great, and he soon found himself borne to the ground, and held down by "Sal" and the negro, while the two Emersons bound him. He was then carried to Gabe's cabin, adjoining the kitchen, and locked in.

Two hours passed, and the pupils from the field returned to breakfast. The moment that Harry Summers entered the house, the negro and James Emerson jumped upon him, taking him entirely off his guard, while Mr Emerson, senior, kept back the others from approaching. In a few minutes the elder of the two Summers was also a prisoner, tied hand and foot.

The other three pupils—two were on the prairie with the cattle—were powerless to interfere, and being the smallest boys of the establishment were completely overawed.

At about eight o'clock John Emerson and his wife visited Arthur, who had been vainly endeavouring to loosen his bonds sufficiently to free his arms.

"Now," said Mrs Emerson, flourishing Vallance's pistol in his face, "last night you made us sign an agreement, but our turn has come, and we are going to retaliate. You, now, must sign an apology, and an undertaking to behave quietly and obey us implicitly for the next year."

"I'm hanged if I do," growled Arthur.

"If you don't we'll flog you. We're going to flog Fred Summers, and we'll give it to you too."

"Going to flog Fred?" asked Vallance, horrified and aghast at the idea; "going to flog Fred?"

"Yes," said Mr Emerson, in a voice that betokened some uneasiness at the course to which he was being driven by his wife; "my wife cannot overlook the insult young Summers inflicted upon her last night. He is to be publicly flogged before you all."

"If you do touch him, we'll kill you!" said Vallance, fiercely. "By heaven! we'll lynch you!"

"Wait till you are free before you talk like that," retorted the woman. "I'll have that defiant spirit whipped out of you."

And she laughed a fiendish laugh, that jarred horribly upon the youthful prisoner's feelings.

"They laugh that win," said Arthur, after a moment's pause, "the game is not nearly over yet. Our time will come."

"Vallance," said Emerson slowly, "if you will submit now, and admit that you've been in the wrong, I'll release you shortly. There's a lot of work to be done on the farm, and this rebellion is putting me behindhand. I would like things to be quickly settled so we all can get to work."

Both the man's tones and manner plainly indicated to Arthur that his courage was waning, and that he was fearful of the ultimate results of the summary proceedings of the morning. Doubtless, had it not been for Mrs Emerson, matters would never have arrived at the present crisis, and even now, the victor was the first to weaken.

Vallance understood John Emerson's char-

acter pretty well by this time, and knew that he was a cruel and treacherous coward, upon whom no reliance could be placed, but who could be equally influenced by fear and self-interest. It was evident that his anxiety to get certain work on the farm finished was overruling his desire for revenge, and that timidity and dread of the ultimate consequences of too daring and brutal a course were urging him to retreat from the position he had assumed. Had it not been for his wife, he would have made terms at that moment with all his dissentient pupils.

But Mrs Emerson was of a far sterner and more daring nature than her husband, and would rather have seen the place in ashes than be thwarted of her vengeance.

Arthur realised this also, but submission was a point to which he could never now be driven.

“I’ll never do another second’s work on your farm,” he replied, in a voice that told of rage and ferocity, “but I’ll take good care to burn the place, and destroy your stock. Submit to you, you cowardly cur! I’ll die first. I am an English gentleman, and I order you to release me.”

“We are English too, you young idiot,”

retorted Mrs Emerson, with another fearful grimace.

“English jailbirds, I expect,” was the young man’s answer; there’s a good deal of difference between gentlemen and jailbirds.”

“A lash for every insult is what you’ll get presently,” returned the woman. “I’ll see the strokes laid on. You shall get it after you’ve seen your friend Fred whipped. To-morrow the discipline here will be excellent.”

“Will it? By that time you will have tried your hands at disciplining the flames which will have devoured your cursed, swindling hole.”

“Another lash for that; they are mounting up.”

And then the woman, unable to wait for her expected revenge, gave him a second slap in the face, as hard and stinging as the one she had administered earlier in the morning. He was physically absolutely powerless, but his rage knew no limits, and he talked to them both in a manner that filled Emerson with misgivings, causing him to wonder where it would end. The latter had not expected this spirit and defiance from a youth of nineteen; but, urged on by his

wife, he now shook his fist in the young man's face, and declared that he had written authority from his guardian to deal with him as he thought best, and he intended now to administer a lesson that would put a stop for ever to this tendency to rebellion which had been sown and fostered by Arthur among the pupils.

"You shot and wounded my servant this morning," he said, "but, fortunately, it was only a skin wound, and did not hurt, though it bled a little. For that he shall be revenged by applying the whip."

"I shot him because he was going to rob me," was the answer. "I did not know who he was, because it was dark. I am sorry now it was not you yourself."

"You are, are you?" cried Mrs Emerson; "you wish you had killed him, do you?"

"I do."

"Come, John," the woman said, turning to her husband, "we'll have Fred out now, and punish him for last night."

The two left the stable, and crossed the enclosure to the house. Again the instructor of farm pupils felt his courage waning, and grave apprehensions as to the wisdom of

these extreme measures arising within him, but his wife would listen to no argument. Come what might afterwards, she was resolved that Fred Summers should be degraded and tortured by corporal chastisement. Nothing less than that would now allay her thirst for vengeance or satisfy the cravings of her cruel heart.

James Emerson and the negro were told to go and fetch Fred Summers from the place where he was locked up, and to tie him to a post in the yard used for hitching horses. Gabe limped a little in his walk, for the bullet from Arthur's pistol had passed through a portion of the calf of his right leg, but he grinned fiendishly at the retribution which he thought was about to be enacted on the "pore white trash," as he generally termed his master's agricultural scholars.

Fred struggled to escape as soon as he found himself in the hands of these two, but, securely bound as he was, his efforts could only be perfectly futile. They dragged him forth, stripped him of his clothes, and tied him to the post. This done securely, the younger pupils were summoned to witness punishment, in much the same way as, in the days of flogging in the navy, all hands were piped

on deck to see the administration of the cat-o'-nine-tails.

The plan of bringing Vallance out to be a spectator was not fulfilled, and he was left a prisoner in the stable, Harry Summers also being exempted from the pitiful sight of seeing his brother flogged.

Revolver in hand, James Emerson stood guard over the boys in case of an attempt at rescue, while John and his wife settled the details.

Gabe was ordered to act as executioner, and showed his satisfaction thereat by displaying two rows of white teeth in a delighted smile.

“Six strokes, and not too hard.” said Mr Emerson.

“Twelve strokes, and as hard as you can lay them on,” corrected his wife. “Six strokes are nothing.”

“Really, Sal, twelve is too many, and Gabe is too powerful to put all his strength into them,” remonstrated Mr Emerson. “Besides, we want him to work, not to be disabled.”

“I want twelve,” growled the woman. “He can stand them.”

“Make it nine,” pleaded her husband.

“ No, twelve. Go on, Gabe.”

The negro was standing all ready for work, looking as pleased as though he had come into a fortune, and holding in his hand a long, straight-cutting riding whip. At the word of command from his mistress his great brawny black arm whirled the whip through the air, and brought it down upon the boy’s bare shoulders. Fred squirmed and groaned as the blow fell, but made no outcry.

“ Ha, ha,” laughed Mrs Emerson, noting the long, red weal which rose across the youth’s back ; “ that will restore discipline.”

Twelve times did the negro repeat the blow, but the boy made no sound beyond emitting at each cut a low moan. Once the three lads who had been called to watch the scene made a rush forward to interfere, but they were driven back at the muzzles of the revolvers in the hands of the two Emersons. They were powerless to offer their comrade the slightest assistance. Several loud laughs and grunts of satisfaction came from Mrs Emerson as she noticed the writhes of agony of the boy’s body, but as the last cut fell and her victim had not uttered a single appeal for mercy, she felt disappointed and exasperated.

“ If he doesn’t apologise he shall have it again this afternoon,” she said maliciously, as her husband and Gabe commenced to release Fred from the post.

“ No, no, Sal,” answered Mr Emerson, “ he’s had enough. I won’t do this thing again.”

“ You’re a timid fool,” retorted his wife.

He turned round upon her and whispered in her ear,—

“ Don’t you know that if some of our neighbours, far off as they are, ever hear of this, there’ll be a devil of a row. They’d be over here in no time.”

“ I’m not afraid,” she growled, turning away and walking into the house.

Fred Summers, weak and in terrible pain, but uncowed and unconquered in spirit, was led back to the dingy hole where he had been previously confined, and John Emerson gave the other boys permission to go in and attend to him.

Then the master of the house and his brother joined Mrs Emerson in her room, and discussed the situation of affairs. The question at issue was the punishment of Arthur Vallance, and while the woman advocated the use of the whip towards him, both the men opposed any further step in that direction.

CHAPTER VII.

ARTHUR VISITS SAM HICKS.

THE deliberations of the Emerson family occupied some time, and in the meanwhile two of the pupils were anointing Fred Summers's back with vaseline, while Phillips had crept unseen into the stables to tell Arthur of what had been done. With tears standing in his eyes, and a choking sensation in his throat, the little fellow related the horrible details to the one they all considered their leader.

Vallance listened in silence, and as soon as the story was ended, without making any comment on what he had heard, he said, in a low tone,—

“Get out your knife and cut these ropes round me.”

In an instant the boy whipped out his pocket-knife, opened it, and hacked away at the bonds by which his friend was fastened, until he had released him.

"Now," said Arthur, "help me quickly to saddle the grey."

As he spoke he hurried into an adjoining stall, and releasing the halter from off the head of a big grey horse, slipped the bit in his mouth, and had him bridled in a few seconds. Then Phillips came on the scene with a saddle, which Arthur deftly threw upon the animal's back, tightening up the girths with the rapidity and precision of an experienced horseman. The steed was ready, but there was yet to be faced the difficulty of getting out of the stable and away from the enclosure. The doorway was too low to admit of Arthur's riding through it; he must lead the horse out and mount him in the yard.

"Shall I ever see you again?" asked little Phillips, plaintively, while Vallance pondered for a moment and looked around the stable for something that would serve as a weapon of defence.

"Indeed you will, my boy," was the ready answer. "I am not going to desert you now. I intend to return as the king of vengeance, and pay out these devils for this thing. Bring me that hatchet."

The boy brought him a small hatchet that was hanging up on one of the harness pegs

—there was no special harness-room here—and Arthur took it and swung it over his head, as if to test its availability as a weapon.

“That will do splendidly,” he said, as he lowered it and slipped the handle through his hand until he held it near the blade. “Now, you had better skip out and open out the gate. First of all, see if any one is about.”

The little boy peered cautiously through the doorway, and reported that no one was visible except the nigger, who was some distance away, and had his back turned towards them.

“Go quietly and open the gate, then,” said Arthur, “and then cut away out of sight, so that no one will know you helped me. I shall be back soon. Keep up your courage, but don’t let it out that you released me. I’ll throw my own knife down by those cords, so that they will think I worked a hand loose and got it, and then dropped it accidentally after cutting the rope.”

Phillips went quietly out of the stable, and, unnoticed by the negro, reaching the gate opened it, and then sauntered back

to the house, finally taking up a position round a corner, where he could see his friend escape, and yet at the same time be unobserved.

In the meanwhile, Arthur dropped his knife in the stall where he had been tied, and then, taking the big grey by the head, led him to the door, and looked out. Gabe and young Phillips were the only persons he could see, and the former was leaning against the fence looking in the opposite direction, and smoking a pipe. It was a splendid opportunity, and Vallance at once availed himself of it.

He pushed the door wide open, and stepped quickly out of the stable, leading the horse after him, and the next moment he vaulted nimbly into the saddle. The animal gave a bound of delight, and commenced to prance round in a circle. Then Arthur patted his neck, and spoke to him in a low tone, finally inducing him to trot towards the gate, but not until the noise had caused Gabe to look round and take in the state of affairs.

Dropping his pipe, the negro ran for the gate as fast as his wounded leg would allow, in order to intercept the fugitive, and succeeded in getting there in time to catch hold of Arthur's bridle.

"I'se jess in time to stop dat game," cried Gabe, giving the horse's mouth a jerk that made him rear up. "Down yo' comes, yo' white hoss thief."

"Let him go," answered Arthur, standing up in his stirrups, and whirling the hatchet above his head.

"Down yo' comes," was the nigger's only response, as he tried once more to back the horse, and, failing in this, seized hold of the rider's left leg, and attempted to unseat him.

Down it came!—the hatchet upon the negro's head—crashing through his thick skull as if it had been an egg-shell. Down dropped the darkie to the ground without the opportunity to utter either groan or curse, and the big grey horse plunged forward over the body, carrying Vallance safely through the gate out into the open prairie. The conflict had not lasted a minute, but it had decreased the black population of the United States by one, and it had yielded a portion of that vengeance for which the young Englishman was thirsting.

Arthur knew perfectly well as he cantered away over the level prairie, varied here and there by slight undulations, that

he had killed the negro, for he had put forth his whole strength into the blow, and he had felt the sharp blade of the hatchet penetrate deep into the skull ; but the knowledge conveyed to him no regret, no remorse, no painful reflection ; it only brought him the satisfactory sensation of having in a measure avenged the unpardonable insult offered to, and the horrible cruelty inflicted upon, his friend.

For about four miles he rode at a steady canter, frequently looking back to see if he were pursued, and each time being gratified at seeing no one moving. Then, having put that much distance between him and Square Mile Farm, he slackened his horse's pace, and proceeded more leisurely.

He had nothing now to fear from pursuit. The animal he was riding was the only really good one in Mr Emerson's stable, and there was none other there to compare with it either in speed or staying powers. The only others possessing any speed at all were the two which were carrying the boys who were out with the cattle, and these, of course, were not available. The consequence was that he felt able to take his own time, and to deliberate in peace over the course to be adopted.

The events of the last few hours had completed a transformation in his character and disposition which had been in progress ever since his exile nearly two years ago.

The gloomy boy who had sat beside the river in Gloucestershire, morbidly puzzling his brain over the complex doctrine of an inevitable Hell, existed no more; the romantic and affectionate lad, who had almost given way to tears when bidding good-bye to Violet Carlisle, had being no longer; the passionate youth, stung to the quick by unkind treatment at home, was a person of the past; the green young man, who had fallen so easy a dupe to the wiles of Miss Minnie Sharp, and had been drugged and robbed in a manner almost grotesque for its simplicity, was gone; and out of all these had evolved a resolute and daring man, quick of thought and energetic in action, susceptible of keen sympathy towards his friends in trouble, but capable of resorting to the most desperate extremes to avenge himself upon those by whom he had been wronged.

Hatred had found a snug resting-place in his bosom, and consequences and punishments did not trouble him at all. All his life he had been in a state of punishment,

and the vision of everlasting torture had been the first thing held up before his childish gaze ; but, as he trotted over the turf at this moment, his mind seemed to attain a broader scope than ever before, and the doubts and misgivings of the days gone by gave way to conviction and confidence. He was now perfectly fearless and thoroughly self-reliant.

It was about mid-day when he rode into the little settlement of Elton, increased in two years from four frame dwellings to twelve, and requested one of the inhabitants to give him food for himself and his horse. Just before reaching this spot he had ridden to the top of a small bluff near by and carefully scanned the prairie in the direction of Square Mile Farm for signs of pursuers, but had been unable to detect any one, and therefore he felt that he could spare at least a quarter-of-an-hour before continuing his journey. Up to the present time he had been without food all day, and was naturally hungry. The ham and eggs and corn bread which were quickly placed before him were, therefore, doubly inviting, and tended greatly to restore him from the physical fatigue which had commenced to make itself felt.

Having appeased his appetite and paid for what had been supplied to him, he inquired the way to Sam Hicks's.

The man of whom he inquired led him round the house, and pointing to a dark spot on the prairie several miles away, said :

“Ye see that clump o’ trees?”

“Is that a clump of trees?” asked Arthur, thinking it looked as much like a cloud as like anything else.

“That’s a clump o’ trees set upon a small bluff,” was the reply. “Ye ride straight to that clump, and when ye git thar go round to other side of it, and thar ye’ll see Sam’s place. Ye can’t miss it; its the biggest place anywhar about hyar.”

“I suppose Mr Hicks is still living there?”

“He was living yesterday, ‘cause I see’d him and spoke to him. He’s thar, right enough. Ye a friend o’ his?”

“I don’t know him very well, but I am going to him now. I haven’t seen him for some time.”

“Waal, he’s a good un, he is. Thar aint a better nor a squarer man in the West. Come in and have a drink. Any friend o’ Sam’s is welcome to anything I’ve got.”

Arthur went inside the house, accepted a

glass of whisky from his new acquaintance, and after drinking it mounted the grey and resumed his journey.

He had said nothing in Elton about the row at Square Mile Farm. He had great faith in Sam Hicks, and had resolved to lay the matter before him in preference to appealing elsewhere. That the rough and ready Westerner would aid him in effecting the release of his friends, and in avenging the ill-treatment accorded to Fred Summers, he felt convinced.

A long solitary ride followed his brief rest at Elton, but Arthur found his horse possessed of plenty of spirit and endurance, and although he gave him a hard gallop and rode fast the entire distance, the animal still had a good deal of "go" in him when finally he was pulled up opposite a large wooden house, and his rider dismounted to shake hands with Mr. Hicks, who was one of the most peculiar combinations of soft-hearted humanity and stern desperation that western ranches or mining camps had ever known.

"You hardly remember me?" said Arthur, looking admiringly at the kindly face and huge muscular frame of his old friend."

"I remember ye right enuff," answered Mr. Hicks, "and I've often wondered how ye was

gitting on. Ye might have come over afore this. I never thought ye would be in these parts now. Bin thar iver since?"

"Yes; its a dreadful place. We are noth-
ing but prisoners there. It's an infernal hole.
I wish now that I had come over to you before,
but I had only seen you once in my life, and
I didn't think it would be much use to bother
you, and besides you are such a distance
away."

"Distance ain't nothing with sich an animal
as that," responded the brawny Westerner,
looking approvingly over the grey's points.

"It isn't mine; it belongs to Emerson."

"Ye, yerself, have filled out into a mighty
fine lad," continued Mr Hicks, diverting his
attention from the horse to Arthur. "That
arm o' yers ought to be able to hit as hard as
a mule's kick. But what's the trouble—any-
thing as needs a bit o' fighting? I've got a
few boys here looking after the cattle, and
doing other jobs as are dandies in a row.
Thar ain't no nonsense about 'em. What are
ye doing with that chopper?"

"I am not doing anything with it just now,
but this morning I split a nigger's head open
with it."

"Send him to jine the majority?"

“I killed him.”

“That’s a good beginning for a lad like ye, but let’s give yer hoss a bit o’ food, and get the saddle off him, and then we’ll hear all about it. Always be kind to an animal.”

They led the grey round to the stable, and while Arthur took off the saddle and bridle, Sam Hicks put a feed of corn into the manger and some hay into the rack.

“Now,” said the latter, as he shut the stable door, “let’s hear about the doings at Squar’ Mile Farm. A nigger more or less doant make much difference in this country ; thar’s a sight too many of ’em, anyhow, but if this un’s got any friends they may try to make trouble for ye.”

Then Arthur Vallance related to Mr Hicks the history of his life at Square Mile Farm, telling him of all the drudgery the pupils had been forced to undergo, of the slavery to which they had been subjected, of the poor food and the wretched accommodation, of the bullying propensities of John Emerson and his wife, of the insulting treatment accorded them by Gabe.

“Why did ye put up with it so long ?” asked Sam.

“Because we had no money and no friends,

and there was no place anywhere near. To have run away from there seemed at one time to mean certain starvation. Besides, some of us had hopes that every day would bring release. Then, you see, we were all put there by our parents or guardians."

"A fine lot they must be. But go on, let's hear it all."

Arthur continued his story, finally finishing with the flogging of Fred Summers, and his own escape after braining the negro.

When he heard about the whipping of young Summers, Mr Hicks's face grew sombre and savage, and his eyes flashed with anger; but when he heard of Arthur's conflict with Gabe, his features relaxed, a pleased smile spread over his countenance, and seizing the young man's hand, he shook it vigorously, saying,—

"I'm proud to know ye; by heaven, I am! Ye're a credit to yer country. Ye're sartain the nigger's dead?"

"I am sure he is."

"Wal, it's good for him he is. Thar ain't nothing on earth could save him from dangling to a tree, but death. Thar ain't no nigger in this country going to flog a white man and live after it—not much, thar ain't! And

now ye want Sam Hicks to help release yer friends, and punish them varmints, the Emersons, eh ? ”

“ “ Yes, I do ; and I came here because I felt sure you would do it.”

“ Looky hyar, I’ve forgot yer name, it’s so long since I saw ye.”

“ Arthur Vallance.”

“ Wal, Arthur, ye may reckon on me. To-morrow, I and some of the boys will ride over to Squar’ Mile Farm with ye, and ef ye ain’t satisfied with the bit o’ law we will deal out to them people, ye’ll be hard to please. Yer friends shall be rescued, and thar’ll be a lesson taught on that farm that will be the talk of the neighbourhood. We’ll teach them British thieves a trick or two. The man that orders a nigger to whip a white man can’t live hyarabouts. I’ll arrange with the boys to-night, and thar’s a couple o’ lads at Elton who’d like to jine us, I know.”

“ They are well armed out there, and we shall be sure to have a tussle.”

“ How many of ‘em is thar ? ”

“ There are the two Emersons, both big strong men ; ‘ Sal,’ who will fight as well as any two men ; and the negro, who’s dead.”

“ Two men, a woman, and a dead darkie.

That's three. Ken they shoot pretty straight?"

"I don't think they are up to much at it, especially with pistols. The two brothers can shoot a little with rifles, and so can Sal."

"Will they make a good fight, or will they lay down when they sees we are on to 'em?"

"The woman will fight as long as she thinks she has got a chance, but the men will weaken as soon as they think the odds are the least bit against them."

"Wal, if we ken surprise 'em it will be better. Maybe they woant suspect us until it's too late; but, if they gets behind shelter and we are out in the open, we shall hear their bullets whistle. What weapons have ye got?"

"None; I had a pistol, but they got it this morning."

"I'll lend ye a 'shooter.' Ef they're three in cover and out of sight, it'll need more than three in the open to make it a squar' fight. Now, thar's ye and I, and two lads from Elton will make four, and three of my boys will be seven, and ole Jack Dodd and his son, who live a couple o' miles from hyar, will be nine.

That'll be enuff. Ef we nine can't dislodge them it'll be a pity. I s'pose none o' the boys will fight on their side."

"Not they; but you must look out you don't hit any of them if you fire at the house."

"We woant fire at the house permiscuous. May be we sha'n't have to fight at all."

"I don't mind the fighting if I get it with the Emersons on anything like even terms."

"Feeling a bit hungry for revenge, eh? Wal, thar's nothing like it. Thar be some wounds that can't be healed except with some one else's blood. Yer's be one of 'em, I guess. But the boy who has the heaviest account due to him is the one that was stripped and whipped. That's the score we've all got to jine in settling. We doant allow none o' that sort o' thing amongst us. And now ye'd better come and have something to eat and drink. This ain't a palace, this shanty o' mine, but thar's plenty to eat and drink, and thar's a bed or two which wouldn't feel hard to a baby, and ye've got a rale, squar', honest man for yer host, and a right good woman for your hostess."

"Thanks, very much. It's awfully good

of you to do all this, but somehow I felt sure you would."

"Ye're right. Anyone hyarabouts within fifty miles will tell ye that Sam Hicks never refuses to help a decent fellow out of trouble, nor to assist in dealing out jestice to a rascal."

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSTERNATION PREVAILS AT SQUARE MILE FARM.

IN spite of the exciting events through which he had passed, and the still more exciting events which were in anticipation, Arthur Vallance managed to put in a thoroughly good night's sleep at Sam Hicks's, so that in the morning he awoke, refreshed both in body and spirit. All the necessary arrangements for the excursion of revenge had been completed by Mr Hicks the evening before, and the Dodds' had promised to meet them at Elton.

Five o'clock was the time fixed for the start, and half-an-hour before that, Mr Hicks and the men—commonly called “boys”—who worked on the place, were assembled in the kitchen at breakfast. A very formidable company they looked, as they sat on benches round a plain wooden table; their

much-worn breeches and boots bearing traces of wear and tear ; a revolver showing prominently in each one's belt, and coarse red-flannel shirts, cut very low at the necks, staring out through their unbuttoned coats. Big, bronzed, brawny, and weather-beaten, as they all seemed, there was an air of free-and-easy friendliness and goodwill towards each other that contrasted pleasantly to the glum hostility and bad feelings that had always prevailed at Square Mile Farm. Rough and hard as was their life, they seemed to be exempt from all trouble, and to know nothing of care.

When Arthur entered, a few minutes after they had taken their seats, he was greeted with a friendly salute from all, Sam Hicks cordially shaking him by the hands, and making room for him at his side.

“ Boys,” said Mr Hicks addressing his men ; “ this is the lad I’ve told ye about. He and his comrades are crying to us to help ’em to vingence, and I guess they ain’t going to cry in vain, eh ? ”

“ I guess not,” came in a chorus from round the table ; “ and I guess when a nigger is made to lay the whip on the

bare back of a white man, it's time for us to act. Thar ain't nothing but death can ever atone for that, eh?"

"Nothing," echoed the chorus; louder than before.

"Wal, boys; as I've told ye, the nigger's dead, and we can't do nothing with him—more's the pity; but we've got to rescue all them English boys from the clutches of this hyar thieving, sneaking cur of a British farm pupil teacher, and we've got to show him that we doant allow any sich darned perceedings in our part o' the world, eh?"

"Yes, yes; tie him up! Send him to jine the nigger!" cried the chorus.

"Wal, boys; we woant decide his punishment yet. We've first got to ketch our 'possum afore we eats him, and thar may be a bit o' fighting afore its all over. But thar ain't any one hyar that minds a bit o' shooting when thar's jestice to be done."

"Not much."

"O' course; we wants to take 'em all prisoners ef we ken, and we wants to do our duty in this matter in a proper gentlemanly manner—jest like we lynched

them fellows that stole my cattle three years ago. The way in which we did 'em up was a credit to the country."

"It was that."

"I've lived hyar many years now. I was hyar when them red-skin Injuns were as thick as bees, but thar ain't never bin sich a thing known as a nigger flogging a white man afore."

"And that never shall be agin."

"No ; I guess thar woant. Every one knows me hyarabouts, and they generally looks to me to set sich things right. Thar ain't bin a man lynched within twenty miles o' hyar for twenty years back, but I've bin present at the job, and now, as ye all know, when anything o' this kind takes place, the people allays says 'if Sam Hicks was thar it was proper and lawful.' Doant they say that ?"

"Yes ; they do."

"Wal, tharfore, boys ; we mustn't get too wild-like ; we must go to work in this in the same respectable and quiet manner we've allays done. My friend hyar is a young Englishman, and we mustn't let him think that we are wild or cruel."

"I should never think that," said Arthur.

"I don't wonder the people have a high opinion of you. Just think of all the trouble you are taking now to help us poor chaps."

"A man that woant take trouble to help his friend ain't a true man, but hyar we always helps each other all we can, friends or strangers. But ye're my friend, and I'm darned proud to say it. Ye ain't eatting much, and food is what ye wants afore this long ride."

A few minutes later the three cow-boys who were to accompany them left the kitchen, and almost immediately after the tramping of several horses' feet was heard outside. Then Mr Hicks rose from his seat and, taking a pistol and a rifle from off an adjoining shelf, stuck the former in his belt, and slung the latter over his shoulder. Having thus equipped himself for combat, he proceeded to arm Arthur, lending him a repeating rifle and a heavy five-chambered revolver.

When they went outside, Arthur found one of the men holding Mr Emerson's big grey horse, saddled and bridled, while another man held a powerful black stallion belonging to his host. The three cow-boys

armed precisely as their master, were already mounted.

The cavalcade moved slowly out of the enclosure, but broke into a sharp trot as soon as it entered the open prairie. The sun, in almost midsummer glory, was just a little above the horizon, a soft, sweet-scented breeze was blowing from the south-west, fanning the riders' chests, and filling their lungs with invigorating oxygen, while the long grass was rising and falling in gentle ripples as regular as the motion of a nearly calm sea. It was a grand morning, both to regard and feel, and men and beasts soon felt its exhilarating effects. Sam Hicks and Arthur Vallance rode in front, the others following close in the rear, and with many a good story of life in those parts did the Westerner regale his friend, as they made their way across the prairie.

At Elton they stopped to feed their horses, and to refresh themselves with a cold lunch and lager beer, and when they resumed their journey, the two Dodds and a couple of other men had augmented their number to nine. Every man was armed with rifle and pistol.

In the meantime, while Arthur had sought

refuge and aid at Sam Hicks's, confusion and dismay had been reigning supreme at Square Mile Farm.

The boy Phillips had been the only spectator of the collision between his friend Vallance and the negro Gabe, and just as, regardless of all consequences, the little fellow was rushing to Arthur's aid, he had seen the hatchet cleave right through the darkie's skull, and the darkie himself fall a lifeless mass at the horse's feet. For a moment the lad was paralysed with terror and awe, not knowing what to do, and stood a few feet distant from the negro, gazing alternately at the body and at his friend's retreating form. Then he walked slowly to the house and joined his companions, who were with Fred Summers.

Not a word, however, did he say of what had occurred outside, but, looking pale and frightened, he crept quietly to Fred's side and silently sat down.

It was at least an hour later when the discussion between Mrs Emerson and her husband and brother-in-law was brought to an end by the woman gaining the day, and succeeding in persuading John Emerson to consent to inflict upon Vallance a similar punishment to what the younger Summers

had undergone. Then, exultant and beaming with triumph and anticipation of more revenge, she had strode into the yard to announce to her victim the resolution to which they had come.

Very short-lived, indeed, was her satisfaction, for no sooner had she left the house, than she beheld the negro lying on the ground.

“Get up, Gabe, you lazy hound,” she cried, “get up and get your whip ready. There’s more work for you.”

But the black man neither moved nor answered, and then, something in his position striking her as strange and unusual, she advanced towards him, and saw instantly that he had been killed. The sight did not overcome her, nor did it seem greatly to shock her, but, after contemplating the body in silence for a few seconds, she rushed into the house and told her husband that some one had beaten their servant to death.

Then, the two brothers and the woman went to the scene together, and a brief inspection sufficed to show that life was entirely extinct from the body of their huge black cook. They were puzzled. At first it did not occur to them that Vallance had

escaped, and that the negro had met his fate in attempting to stop him, but visions of cowboys and Indians rose up before them, causing them eagerly to scan the prairie. There being no one within sight, the next idea that entered their heads was that the place had been raided by horse-thieves, and forthwith they rushed to the long shed which did duty as a stable.

First they noticed the absence of the grey, and then they saw the vacant stall where Arthur had been tied, the cut ropes lying upon the ground, and the mystery was solved.

All three of them simultaneously recognised the fact that they had been outwitted and defeated, and that they were left in a very serious position. Not one of them supposed for a moment that Arthur had galloped away intending to desert his comrades, but, on the contrary, the conviction forced itself upon their minds, that he had gone to tell of their doings to any man he could find, and that he would probably return at the head of a small mob. Then, terror struck deep into the hearts of the two men, for they knew, if some of the rough-and-ready citizens of the prairie should learn of the manner

in which they had made a negro whip a white lad, that a very summary vengeance would be dealt out to them.

“He’s a desperado, that Vallance,” said John Emerson, picking up the knife which Arthur had purposely dropped in the stall. “I have always felt that he would do something of this kind.”

“It’s the outcome of your milk-and-water manner of dealing with him,” grumbled Mrs Emerson. “You had better follow him at once, before he gets clean away.”

“It’s no use following him now. I dare-say he’s miles away.” You might as well send a tortoise to chase a deer as anything here to chase him on the grey.”

“Then what do you intend to do about it? He’s a murderer; he must be caught. I’ll have him lynched. I’ll have none of your wavering, half-hearted policy any longer. This is what it leads to.”

“It’s your d—d bullying that has done this,” retorted the instructor of farm pupils, facing his wife angrily. “I never wanted to go to such extremes. Flogging might be all very well for a boy like Phillips, but not for a chap of Fred Summers’s age. It’s you who have brought this about. He’ll

come back too soon, without being brought back. This is a very serious affair."

"Very serious, indeed," remarked James Emerson. "I don't know what to advise. We shall miss poor Gabe terribly. Is it necessary to report his death to any one, or shall we say nothing about it, but just bury him?"

"We'll do nothing for a day or two, until we see what Vallance does. He'll come back, I am sure, and he won't come alone."

"Well, when he comes, we'll charge him with murder and horse-stealing," said Mrs Emerson.

"As if any of those who come with him would listen to us," sneered her husband. "However, we don't want them to come and find any one kept a prisoner, so we'll release Summers at once. I'm afraid you've gone too far, Sal."

"You're a coward," was the vigorous but somewhat uncivil reply. "If he brings any one here, we can fight them, can't we? I am not afraid; I can fire both pistol and rifle."

"Sal," said Mr Emerson, slowly and impressively, "a few shots from your pistol or rifle would only aggravate the situation.

Men about here care no more for the crack of a pistol than you do for the gobbling of a turkey-cock. If we once fire on them, they'll hang James and me, and burn you for a witch."

"They've got to take us first to hang and burn us. You may go out and surrender, Mr Emerson, if you like, but I'll barricade the house and work the artillery. They won't take Sal Emerson."

"We may be raising a false alarm," interposed James. "Vallance may go straight to Fargo, and leave for the east."

"I would willingly lose my horse to know that he had done so," moaned the elder brother; "but he hasn't—he's not that sort of boy. He'll go to that outlaw and terror of the community, Sam Hicks, for he threatened to do so once before."

"And what do I care for Sam Hicks?" screamed Mrs Emerson.

"He's a notorious desperado," said John Emerson; "he's a sort of Napoleon Bonaparte in these parts."

"Then I'll be his Duke of Wellington," retorted the woman. "I'll let him see there's one person in the world he can't bully."

"Talk and actions are different things, Sal. If Hicks and any of his gang come over here, we'd better receive them peaceably. A volley or two of curses and abuse at fellows like him won't do a bit of good."

"A volley or two of bullets may."

"They don't care any more for a few bullets than for a few hailstones. The only thing is, that he may not think it worth while bothering about, and I'm afraid there is not much chance of that. We'd better move Gabe somewhere, James, until we have quite decided our course."

"The wood-shed is the best place," said James; "and to-morrow we must bury him. If we don't hear from Vallance by to-morrow, we can take it for granted that he has run away altogether. That is not impossible, as he may be frightened at what he has done. What is the customary thing to do in a case of death like this?"

"Nothing that I know of, except to bury him. There are no registrars or coroners here, as far as I know, although there may be. The less fuss we make about it the better. Gabe will never be missed, and the whole country would side

with Vallance when he told the truth. Myself, I consider our position a very awkward one."

All through the day the Emersons were in a state of perpetual anxiety and uneasiness, fearing that Arthur would obtain assistance and return to wreak vengeance upon their heads. It never occurred to them to inquire if any of the pupils had seen the fatal fight, and little Phillips kept his secret manfully until after Mr Emerson informed them of the tragedy, and then he only told confidentially to the two Summers all that he had seen and done.

CHAPTER IX.

MR HICKS ADMINISTERS JUSTICE.

THE satisfaction with which the pupils received the news of the abrupt termination to the negro's earthly career knew no bounds, and it was as much as some of them could do to refrain from throwing their hats up into the air and hurrahing. And then, indeed, Arthur became a hero in their eyes, and they likened his powers against the darkie to that of David against Goliath.

Absolutely no work was done on the farm during the day, and when the two youths who had been out with the cattle came in at night, the story had to be retold again and again, before they could thoroughly realise the magnitude of the events that had taken place during their absence.

The following morning some attempt was made by John Emerson to resume the usual routine, but he was not surprised when both

Harry and Fred Summers flatly refused to do a stroke of any kind of labour, and strange to say he did not make an effort to compel them, neither did he use any threats towards them.

Little Phillips had imparted to these two the information that when Arthur Vallance had left he had promised to come back soon, and upon this promise they relied with unwavering fidelity, feeling positive that their champion and leader would return with ample assistance.

Wishing, however, to keep this cheering news from the Emersons, they decided not to tell it to the other pupils, in case these should show too much confidence or be overheard discussing it, and thus put the enemy on its guard.

All the morning both the Emersons and their pupils were in a state of excitement and disquiet. Time and time again Mrs Emerson ascended to the flat roof of the building, and scanned the country through a pair of field-glasses ; and time and time again the two Summers climbed to the highest point on the top of the stable, and searched the prairie with their naked eyes.

It was only a little past noon when the

woman's shrill voice rang through the house, screaming "John, John!" At that moment John was discussing with James the best location for the final resting-place of their late cook, but he ran to his wife as soon as he heard her calling.

"John," she said, with visible agitation, "there are several men riding over the prairie in this direction; they are all in a bunch together, and they are riding fast."

Mr Emerson's face turned a shade paler as he took the glasses from his wife and levelled them in the direction indicated.

"Yes, Sal, you are right," he said, his hand shaking so that he could not hold the glasses steady, "they are coming straight here. I can't make out any one yet, it's too far."

"There must be quite a dozen," said Mrs Emerson; "it seems quite a large body of men. I can see them distinctly now without the glasses. What are we to do? The rifles and pistols are all well loaded. If Vallance is with them we may be sure they mean mischief."

"Vallance is with them," was the reply, spoken in a very desponding tone. "I can make out a grey horse now. He is riding in

front with a tall man mounted on a big brown or black horse."

Mrs Emerson made no answer. She ran to the edge of the roof and called to her brother-in-law, telling him to go and lock the gate of the enclosure.

"Sal," said her husband, a quarter of an hour later, when the approaching horsemen were easily distinguishable, in a voice that was now pregnant with fear, "Sal!"

"Well, what is it?"

"There are nine of them, and every one has a rifle slung across his back. Even Vallance has one."

"That means a battle. Well, I am ready."

"Sal, I admire your courage, but it is foolhardy. Have you ever been able to hit anything you fired at?"

"No; but I have hardly ever tried. You are not such a magnificent shot yourself that you can boast."

"That's just it, Sal. While we are making a noise with our rifles, and doing no harm to anyone except to aggravate those fellows by it, they'll be picking us off the moment we show a nose or a finger."

"Vallance can't shoot."

"There are eight others beside Vallance,

and some of them are regular cow-boys, I can see."

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"I think we had better meet them in a friendly spirit, and make the best of it we can."

"Meet Vallance in a friendly spirit," she sneered contemptuously, "he would reciprocate it, wouldn't he? No, I'll die with my boots on; I'll never submit to him. Only twenty-four hours ago we were going to flog him, and now you preach submission. No, John, I fight, and so do you. The rifles and pistols are all loaded and laid out on the table in our room."

"It's perfectly hopeless," murmured her husband, "but if you insist, I suppose it must be done. They are coming on at a terrific rate now, and Vallance is in front of all."

At this moment James Emerson joined his brother and sister-in-law, and the three stood together on the roof watching the approach of Arthur and his companions.

"Everything is in trim for a siege," said Sal; "we have only got to shut and barricade the door."

"We may as well do it once," said John

Emerson ; “ it’s against my wishes and judgment, but it may come out all right, though I don’t believe it will.”

They turned round and walked to the trap-door which led down a ladder into the house. To their amazement, it was shut and fastened, although only a few minutes ago James Emerson had passed through it.

“ Treachery ! ” cried out John Emerson ; “ the boys have locked us out ! What fools we were not to keep an eye on them ! ”

They tugged and pulled at the door, but to no avail ; it was securely bolted on the inside.

Then they walked round the roof, searching for a possible means of escape, but there was none, unless they chose to jump down to the ground, and although not over twenty feet, this was a drop that did not commend itself to either of them. While they were still stalking round and round, and up and down, they saw Fred and Harry Summers and Phillips running out of the enclosure, each carrying a rifle.

“ The demons ! ” cried Mrs Emerson, “ they have stolen our arms, and are going to meet the enemy.”

And this was true. The two Summers,

as soon as they had descried the troop of horsemen riding across the prairie, had held a brief consultation as to what they should do to aid their approaching friends, and, during this consultation, they had heard Mrs Emerson directing her brother-in-law to fasten the gate, and had seen the latter join his brother and sister-in-law upon the roof.

Instantly the idea of imprisoning the three upon the top of the house had entered Fred's head, and he had darted off to put it into execution. Unseen and unheard, he had crept up the ladder, gently pulled down the trap-door, and shot the bolts. Then he had descended again, and looking into the Emersons' private room, had seen the firearms laid ready on the table. These he had divided between his brother, young Phillips and himself, and had then marched out to meet Arthur Vallance and those accompanying him, leaving the master of the establishment and his wife and brother prisoners upon the roof of their own house.

The cavalcade halted as soon as they came up to the three boys, and Vallance joyfully greeted his old comrades.

“Our day has come at last,” he said savagely; “we shall be able to cry quits

very soon now. I suppose they will make a fight."

"No, they won't; they are treed," replied Fred. "We've stolen their guns, and locked them up on the roof. They are prowling about up there now like caged tigers."

"A darned clever trick," remarked Sam Hicks. "Ye're a plucky lot, ye English lads. Which of ye is the one that was whipped?"

"I am," replied Fred; "my back will show that. But I intend to square that account yet."

"O' course ye do, and we're going to help ye. I never heard o' sich a thing as flogging a young man yer size, and by a nigger, too."

"Come on," said Arthur, "let's move up, and have them down from the roof."

"Hold on a second," answered Mr Hicks, "afore we goes into action it'll be more squar' if me and the other boys jest has a glimpse at his back, so we can see the marks ourselves. No offence to any of ye, but that would be the most reg'lar way to perceed."

"I'll show you," answered Fred, without a moment's hesitation, jerking off his coat, loosening his shirt, and revealing a back scarred with long red weals.

Each man in the troop rode close beside him, took a brief look at his back, and turned away again.

“And that was done by the nigger, at the command of his master, eh ?” asked Mr Hicks.

“Yes,” replied Fred ; “or, rather, at the command of his mistress.”

“Same thing,” said the Westerner, and turning to Phillips, he asked,—

“Did ye see it done ?”

“Yes.”

“That’s all, boys,” said Sam Hicks, standing up in his stirrups and addressing his little troop. “The case is clarly proven, and now its our duty to seize the varmints. Forward ! Git your shooters to hand.”

At the last word each of the men advanced at a trot, holding his revolver in his right hand. Pulling up a few yards from the house, Sam Hicks called to John Emerson, who was watching from the roof, that he wished to have a few words with him.

“What about ?” was the reply.

“Time enough to tell that when ye get down hyar. Move yerself, now.

“How can I move when I am locked up here ?”

"Ah, yes, o' course ye can't. We'll attend to that." Then, turning to Arthur he said : "Ye and yer friends come with me and the Dodds and we'll secure them. Ye, boys," he added, turning to the remainder of his troop, "jest cover them with the rifles while we goes up."

Instantly the men unslung their rifles and brought them to bear upon the occupants of the roof. Then Mr Hicks told Emerson that he wished him and the other two to stand in a row, in a position where they could be more easily watched.

"You've nothing to fear," called the instructor of farm pupils, "we haven't a pistol between us."

"We have no means of knowing that," was the reply, "and it's always best to do these things reg'lar and proper, and run no risk of accident. For instance, ef ye was to draw a shooter and suddenly shoot this young man that ye love so much, I should never forgive meself for my carelessness. So stand forward and hold up yer hands."

But here Mrs Emerson became cantankerous, and flatly declined to assume the helpless attitude which her husband and his brother wisely adopted.

This, however, did not appear to ruffle Mr Hicks or his comrades in the least, for he merely called out,—

“Never mind, marm, we ain’t going to bother our heads about ye.”

Some of the men laughed at this, and brought down a shower of invective upon themselves from the indignant woman.

A minute later the trap-door of the roof was thrown open and Sam Hicks strode out upon the housetop, followed by Arthur Vallance and several others. Pale and trembling, with their knees almost knocking together, John Emerson and his brother stood with their hands uplifted above their heads. With extraordinary dexterity and alacrity Mr Hicks’s men brought their arms down to their sides and tightly bound them there with ropes, winding these several times round their bodies.

“Doant harm the woman,” said the leader, “but jist tie her claws together so she can’t scratch; she nearly scraped my right eye out.”

And so Mrs Emerson, who had made a vigorous attack on Sam’s face the moment he approached her, had to submit to the indignity of having her hands tied behind

her back. Beyond that, however, no violence was offered her, and no attention was paid to her ravings.

The three prisoners were then taken down the ladder, out into the enclosure, where the rest of the party was waiting, and a circle was formed round them.

"Now," said Mr Hicks, "we will git to business. Whar be all the other boys who belong hyar."

"At work," said Phillips.

"Ah, well, they'll be in now, I darsay. We ought to have 'em here."

"They are coming now," said Fred Summers, pointing to a group of lads just entering the other side of the enclosure.

In a very brief space of time these other pupils had been informed of the latest occurrences, and had joined Mr Hicks's party.

"Now, Mister Emerson," said Sam, "we've ridden nigh on to thirty miles this morning for the purpose o' finding out what it is ye're doing. Thar's a serious charge agen ye—that ye had a white lad flogged by a nigger. Is it kirrect?"

"I had him flogged because—"

"Thar ain't no 'because'—ye had him flogged. That will do. Thar ain't no man

shall do that hyarbouts. Ye also shet these young men up, and made 'em prisoners. Is that kirrect?"

"I did it in self-pertection."

"Wal, that kind o' self-pertection doant do hyarbouts. Ye pretend to take pupils to teach farming and ye work 'em like slaves, doant pay 'em nothing for their work, and treat 'em badly all round. Ye've 'stablished a system o' white slavery. Is that kirrect?"

"No, it isn't," cried Mrs Emerson, who could keep quiet no longer. "No, it isn't. We take farm pupils and teach them farming, and we are entitled to their work, and if their parents are satisfied it's no one else's business."

"It's a long distance to the parents, ain't it?" queried Mr Hicks.

Mrs Emerson made no answer.

"Thar ain't no denying it," he continued, ye're a gang o' thieves, and ye're brutes into the bargain. Do ye think the parents o' that lad would be satisfied ef they see'd his back now?"

"We had authority—"

"Thar ain't no 'thority in this country to do as ye've done. Whar's the nigger?"

“That creature killed him,” screamed the woman, pointing at Arthur Vallance.

“Glad to hear it, marm ; he has saved us the trouble. We should ’ave tied him up by the neck ef we had found him alive. Wal, thar ain’t much more to say. Ye all three desarve lynching.”

At this the woman turned nearly as pale as her husband and brother-in-law had already gone. She realised then that they were perfectly helpless in the hands of this vindictive group, and that death, perhaps, was not far distant. At last she weakened and her spirit gave way ; she set up a howl for mercy, pleading, screaming, and beseeching incoherently.

“It’s always the most cruel who are the greatest cowards,” said Arthur. “There isn’t one of you three who has courage to meet your fate bravely.”

“You daren’t murder us,” sobbed the woman, “it’s too awful ! we’ve done nothing to deserve it.”

“That is a matter o’ ‘pinion,” said Mr Hicks, dryly.

Then, turning to his companions, he held a short conference with them, after which he addressed the prisoners, saying,—

"We ain't going to take yer miserable lives, ye can keep 'em, but we're going to give both ye men what ye gave the British lad. We're going to flog ye. That's what we're going to do. As to ye," he added, addressing Mrs Emerson, "ye're a bad 'un, but we doant flog women. We'll give the men a few extra on yer account."

The woman gave a sigh of relief at hearing the decision, but the two men still looked terribly woebegone and crestfallen. It was, no doubt, a great consolation to be permitted to remain in this world, but it was agony to anticipate a flogging such as their muscular judges would undoubtedly inflict.

"Get 'em ready, boys," said Sam Hicks, "and put the woman in a place where she'll have a good view."

Without a moment's delay, John Emerson was unbound, stripped, and tied to the identical post to which Fred Summers had been fastened. Then, Hicks and his seven comrades, and the two Summers's each administered, in turn, three lashes upon the man's back with the same whip that had been used upon Fred. The professor of agriculture did not take his punishment kindly; he roared and struggled and begged piteously for mercy, but

all to no purpose, for his captors were relentless, and the thirtieth stroke had been administered before he was taken down. As soon as he had received the full allotment he was removed, and James Emerson put in his place.

When the latter had suffered the same penalty he was released, and after the two had resumed their clothes, they were bound as before.

“Now boys,” said Hicks, “we’ve done our duty so far, but it appears to me that these people ought to leave the country. We doant want sich people hyar.”

“No, no; they must go,” cried several voices.

“That’s settled then, they gits orders to quit. And now, boys, let’s see what thar is in the house to eat. I’m powerful hungry.”

CHAPTER X.

THE EXODUS.

MR EMERSON'S uninvited and unwelcome guests made themselves thoroughly at home in the house and helped themselves to everything they could find that tempted their palates. Their horses were treated to an ample meal of corn, and the whole party behaved in a leisurely, free and easy manner that contrasted strangely to the savage method of inflicting punishment which it had practised only a little while before.

All sat down in the shed called a dining-room, where for nearly two years Arthur had eaten his daily meals in discontent and gloom, and made the place ring with a merriment it had never hitherto known, consuming Mr Emerson's whisky, and devouring all the contents of his larder.

Meanwhile the master of the house, his brother, and his wife were picketed outside

in much the same manner as the horses, with the difference that the latter were all enjoying a dinner of corn and hay.

When, however, thirst and hunger had been appeased, and cow-boys' jokes began to fall a little flat, Sam Hicks and Arthur Vallance commenced to discuss the next mode of action.

Then the pupils were summoned to the conference, and the opinion of each one was asked as to whether he wished to remain on the farm or leave at once, and take his chances of finding employment or getting back to England. The decision of all being unanimously in favour of parting from the *soi-disant* agricultural professor for ever, Sam Hicks promised to befriend them to the best of his ability, and to see that they did not leave in a penniless condition, assuring them, moreover, that if they wished, he would obtain them transportation as far as Chicago.

“The railway boys out West are always a good lot,” he said, “and the conductors will pass ye down the road as soon as they hears your story. I darsay, too, that this thieving dog’s got a bit o’ money in the house, and ef so, he must give it up to be

divided among his victims. He's probably got plenty more banked away somewhar, so he woant miss it much. When ye gets to Chicago, if ye pays a visit to the British Consul thar, he'll see ye on your feet.

"I think I know a man, or a lady, at all events, who will help us when we get there," said Arthur.

"Be careful, Arthur, about the ladies," rejoined Mr Hicks, a broad grin expanding over his features, and a merry twinkle lighting up his eyes; "remember the little chicken that took ye out to lunch, and forgot to come back after she'd seen ye to sleep on the sofa and cleaned out yer pockets."

"Haven't you forgotten that yet?" asked Vallance, also smiling at the recollection.

"Never forget that as long as I live," was the reply, followed by a hearty burst of laughter. "Thar's something about it that tickles me nigh to death."

"Well, there is an old proverb which says that experience teaches. I shall never be caught in such a trap again. When I was sent out here I was a green youngster, knowing nothing about the world, and hardly fit to travel alone a hundred miles in my own country."

"Yes, ye was pretty green when I come across ye, but I knowed then that ye only needed the greenness to be rubbed off to turn into a good 'un. However, ye must be carful how ye goes on in the cities ; thar's a powerful lot o' fellers looking out for 'suckers.' I've fallen among 'em meself, and I ain't so powerful stupid."

"I think my wits have been sharpened a bit."

"Wal, ye pupils had better git all your things ready to take with ye. I'm sure Mr Emerson will oblige ye with a wagon and horses to git 'em away with. I'll tell him to call for 'em at the hotel in Fargo. Pack us as quick as ye can, and I'll inquire about a little money for ye."

The boys hurried away to their sleeping shed, and commenced shovelling their clothes and other property into their trunks and boxes as speedily as possible, meanwhile whistling, singing, and talking with an exuberant gleefulness that had never before been heard in that long dingy, comfortless compartment. The joy of the Israelites escaping from Pharaoh must have been mild compared to the raptures of these lads as they made preparations for an exodus

out of the establishment of the farm pupil teacher.

The idea that they were going to face the world, that endless troubles and difficulties might lay before them, that at the best they would have to plead to strangers for employment, or to the British Consul for aid to get home, and at the worst, perhaps, have to beg for bread and shelter, weighed them down not at all. Their delight at being released from the life of drudgery and misery, which had been their lot on Square Mile Farm, overcame all other feelings and considerations.

Mr Hicks, smoking a huge black post-prandial cigar, sauntered leisurely out to John Emerson and inquired where the latter kept his cash. Mr Emerson declined to impart the desired information, but on a hint from the other that if he did not tell, the house would be torn down or burnt, he finally admitted that, fearing this raid, he had put all his ready cash into a box which he had hidden under the floor in his private room. The truth of the statement was soon tested by the cow-boys, who ruthlessly tore up the boards and brought to light a wooden despatch box.

Sam Hicks, on opening this, was disappointed to find only about three hundred

dollars, for he saw that it would be impossible to send the boys home with that amount. However, he divided the money into eight equal sums and handed one to each of the pupils.

The boxes and portmanteaux were now brought out and placed in a wagon to which three of the farm horses had been harnessed, and the smaller pupils clambered to the top of the luggage and took seats thereon. The two Summers had decided to ride, and for that purpose appropriated the horses which they used when tending cattle ; Arthur Vallance determined to stick to the big grey. These plans having been communicated to Mr Emerson, he was informed, at the same time, that all his animals and his wagon would be left at an hotel in Fargo, where he could call for them.

Everything was now nearly ready for the exodus, and the men were waiting for the signal to mount. Arthur was in the house, having re-entered it to find the revolver which had been taken from him ; Harry and Fred Summers were busy letting out all the pigs, cattle, and horses, from their pens and stables. No one else present seemed to understand what was going on, but these

youths went about their occupation in a very quiet business-like manner that plainly indicated some premeditated purpose. A few minutes later Arthur emerged from the house and joined his two friends. Then the three went back into the stables and into the cattle sheds, finally returning to the rest of the company, and taking their horses from those holding them.

“Mount, boys,” cried Sam Hicks, not mounting himself, but walking up to his prisoners, and, with a long bowie knife, cutting the ropes that bound them. “Ye’re free,” he said, addressing the two men and the woman, who were still shaking with fear; “but ye’d better leave these parts. Ye ain’t the sort we wants hyarbouts. Pack up your duds and git.”

Then he walked back to his horse, and vaulted into the saddle.

The cavalcade moved off, the wagon containing the luggage and the pupils taking the lead, the horsemen all following in the rear. Arthur and the two Summers, however, kept their steeds stationary for a minute, allowing the others to get a little in advance of them, but when these had gone a few yards in front, Fred Summers wheeled his horse round, and

trotting close up to the Emerson family who were still standing in a group, said,—

“It’s not all over yet, Sal. These fellows may have thought they had amply avenged me by flogging those two brutes—your husband and brother-in-law—but we sha’n’t be satisfied till Square Mile Farm is in ashes, which it soon will be. That is our revenge on you, Sal. We have fired the whole place, and to-night you can rest your big bones on the open prairie. Arthur, Harry, and I set it on fire, but it was I who thought of it and proposed it. We told you we’d burn you out if you ever tried to flog us, and we’ve kept our words.”

The Emersons were so taken aback by the intelligence these words conveyed that they stood mute and still during their delivery, and allowed Fred Summers to ride away before they could arouse themselves to action or speech.

A minute later the three youths had overtaken Mr Hicks, and were riding beside him.

“Couldn’t help saying a parting word, eh?” said the Westerner, as they cantered up.

“A parting word they’ll remember,” said

Arthur, turning round in the saddle to look back at the place where he had passed two long, miserable years.

With feelings of the keenest satisfaction, he noticed dense columns of smoke emerging from the windows of the house and from all the farm buildings, but he made no remark until a long tongue of flame shot high up out of the roof towards the sky. Then, waving his hand, he cried out to his companions to look.

“Thar’ll be a pretty blaze soon,” remarked Sam Hicks, pulling up to contemplate the scene. “I thought ye boys was up to something o’ that kind. Wal, they desarve it, anyhow. Ye must ‘ave lit her up on the roof.”

“No, I didn’t,” replied Arthur; “I set fire to several parts of the house, but I opened the trap-door to the roof in order to create a greater draught. The flames are coming through it.”

“Ye wasn’t born yesterday,” was Mr Hicks’s reply, as he cast an admiring glance on the stalwart youths at his side. “But I’m glad ye let all the animals out—that was thought-ful. Sure thar’s no pig or anything left shut up anywhar?”

“Certain,” said Fred Summers; “we drove everything out of the enclosure, even the fowls.”

“That was right. I can’t bar to hurt an animal, and I’d ride back to let ‘em out now, if thar was any forgotten.”

“There are not,” said Arthur; “everything is out.”

“Wal, them thieving dogs is larning a lesson,” mused Sam Hicks. “I guess they’ll stop their little games now, and go on like decent folks. Thar ain’t no time in this life when honesty ain’t the best policy, especially out hyar. Some people thinks we are a tough lot in these parts, but I guess we’re about as good as anywhar. We’ve always got a kindly word and a helping hand for a friend, and a bullet or knife for an enemy, and a bit o’ rope for a thief or scoundrel.”

Flames now commenced to burst out in various parts of the buildings, and very soon the entire place was in a blaze. At first the Emersons had been seen rushing about hither and thither in a vain endeavour to save something from the devouring elements, but now they were plainly visible standing together in a group, helplessly watching the destruc-

tion of their property. The horses and cattle, however, tore over the prairie in all directions, snorting and bellowing, their tails high up in the air, as though they regarded the conflagration as an entertainment given especially for their benefit. They did not run clear away from it, but dashed wildly in various directions, sometimes coming to a halt and watching the fire with stupid amazement, and then again bolting off to another position, only to stop again and take another look. Occasionally some inquisitive cow or steer, in search of knowledge, which had approached within range of the volleys of sparks being wafted far and near by the breeze, would receive a red-hot cinder on its back, and then go roaring and kicking over the plain like a demented bull.

The entire cavalcade under Sam Hicks stopped and watched the establishment of Square Mile Farm swiftly fall a prey to the consuming flames, and Mr Emerson's late pupils viewed, with feelings void of all regret, the total destruction of the comfortless shanty in which they had been so poorly housed, and in which their lives had been reduced to the level of the existence of beasts of burden.

But Arthur Vallance and the two Summers

were those who experienced the keenest feelings, for they were the ones who had suffered the most at the hands of their oppressors. Their sensations, indeed, were a savage joy and gratification at the repayment of a long-standing debt of torment and brutality endured, and a humorous delight at the contemplation of the predicament in which they had placed the detested “Sal.”

CHAPTER XI.

MR HICKS AND ARTHUR PART.

WHEN the sun sank beneath the horizon that evening, all the buildings of every description on Square Mile Farm had been reduced to ashes, and there was nothing left to mark their site save a smouldering mass of embers. The fire had not extended beyond the enclosure, for the reason that the surrounding grass and crops were still green and succulent, and impervious to sparks or flames. A little later in the season, when the wheat would have yellowed, and the grass grown crisp and dry with maturity, the chances would have been in favour of the conflagration spreading for miles, perhaps, over the prairie, and enormous damage might have been the result.

The final look at the scene that Arthur Vallance and the rest of the party were able to obtain was when they were just

cresting a bluff a few miles away. On this slightly elevated spot they paused for a moment and looked back, but all that they were able to see was a dark patch standing out in bold relief upon the vast expanse of green carpet which stretched before them, and a quantity of tiny black dots moving about in its neighbourhood. It was too far distant for them to distinguish the human beings from the animals.

“God’s sky will be all the roof they’ll have over thar head’s to-night,” remarked Sam Hicks to Arthur, as they sat upon their horses taking their last glance. “Fortunately for them, it’s a warm night and thar ain’t no fear o’ rain.”

Arthur made no reply for a moment, but gazed up at the grand canopy of Heaven, now streaked with red and gold from the sun just set, and marvelled. The intense calm and the peaceful stillness which prevailed seemed to enter into the hearts of all these rough men, and for a few seconds to lull them into a state of quiet meditation, while into young Vallance’s soul there came feelings of hope and confidence that banished the turbulent passions of revenge and hatred which had controlled his actions

during the proceedings of the day. At times like these, when he would seem to be called by some strange power to a state of reflection, the grand phenomena of nature, the beauty and charm enveloping him, always made a vivid impression on his mind, often for a while completely fascinating and absorbing it.

Then, too, it was at these times that his thoughts would revert to the teachings of his childhood and early youth, to the harsh and intolerant doctrines pounded into his brain, and that, as a soft, fresh breeze will waft itself through a newly opened window of a sick-room, dispelling the foul and reeking air, more healthy ideas of the purpose of all this wonder and wealth of the universe would creep into his mental system, and supplant the distorted and unhealthy notions to which he had been made a victim.

It seemed as if, in the absence of any more highly cultivated and broader mind to help him to other conceptions, and the lack of any literature that would aid him, nature herself, by calling his attention to all her grandeur, made a special effort on his behalf to enlighten his darkness.

"That is the last we shall ever see or hear of Square Mile Farm, I expect," he said, as they turned their horses and descended the slight incline, the distant dark patch at once becoming lost to view.
"Thank goodness it is all over."

"Yes, it all over now, my boy," rejoined Hicks. "Them people will never be heard from agin."

"And we owe you an immense debt of gratitude."

"Ye owe me nothing, except the visit ye've promised to pay me some day. I'm only sorry ye can't come now."

"Thanks, but we fellows must all stick together now, until we can make arrangements."

"Ye're right thar, Arthur. Ye're a friend to be proud of. So long as ye does your duty to each other, ye'll be all right. I'll see ye started off from Fargo all right, and it'll be a quar thing to me ef ye doant light on yer feet."

"I suppose nothing will be said about that negro. It was a matter of self-defence."

"Doant trouble about that. As I said before, a nigger, more or less, doant count

for nothing hyar. We treats 'em right enough so long as they behaves 'emselves, but when they crosses the line o' what we thinks right, that settles 'em."

The stars were twinkling overhead, and the fragrant breath of the summer night came down soft and sweet over the prairie as the party rode into Elton.

Here it had been arranged they should find accommodation till morning, and move on to Fargo at sunrise. Sam Hicks's popularity soon made itself manifest, for the couple of dozen inhabitants of this little place vied with each other in placing everything they possessed at his disposal, with the result that provision and shelter of some sort was provided for every man and beast. True, there were no spare beds in any of the shanties, but there were clean floors for the men and a strongly fenced enclosure for the horses, and with these everyone was satisfied. No precaution was taken against an attack or surprise, for none was deemed necessary, but the cowboys and the two Dodds slept in the open air out in the enclosure with the animals, making the wagon containing the pupils' luggage their resting place.

As the first gleams of the rising sun shot across the plains the entire party awakened into activity, and commenced preparations for the continuation of the journey. A hasty breakfast was eaten, the draught horses were attached to the wagon, and the others were saddled and bridled. The troop, however, was now to be considerably reduced, Mr Hicks having come to the conclusion that himself and one cowboy would be quite sufficient escort to see the lads safely into Fargo. Consequently all the others, having heartily shaken hands with each of the runaway pupils, betook themselves on their several ways, and a few minutes later the vehicle, loaded with luggage and boys started on its travels, followed by Mr Hicks and his cowboy, Arthur Vallance, and the two Summers, on horseback.

Once during the journey they all dismounted, fed and watered their steeds, regaling themselves at the same time with bread and meat, and a little lager that Sam had procured from his friends at Elton.

At noon they reached Fargo and went straight to the Railroad Hotel.

Having left his *protégés* under the care of the manager of that establishment, Mr Hicks crossed the track to the store of his friend Jim Rice.

“Hallo, Sam !”

“Hallo, Jim !”

Mr Rice was standing, without coat or waistcoat, in the doorway of his shop, and drawing his right hand from the depths of an abysmal pocket, extended it to Mr Hicks, who clutched it firmly, and held it for at least a minute.

“Glad to see ye, Sam ; come in and have something.”

“Thanks, I’ll do it ; it’s a dry morning.”

“Are ye acting as convoy to an emigrant train ? I seed ye coming in town jest now, looking as ef ye had a deal o’ bisness on hand.”

“So I have, Jim. And that’s what I want to see ye about. Ye knows all these railroad conductors coming here, doant ye ?”

“Every one of them.”

“Wal, I wants ye to git all them lads I jest brought in, passed down the road to St Paul.”

“I guess I can do that. The railroad

boys 'ill do most anything for me. Who are they?"

"They are pupils off a British farm-pupiling establishment. Meself and some o' me neighbours have jest abolished white slavery out in our parts, and them's the freed slaves. I wants to get 'em to Chicago. I've seen Hank Spicer of the hotel, and he says that you and him can manage it."

"So we can; how many be thar?"

"Eight."

"It's rayther a large order, but we'll do it."

The two men had passed through the store as they talked, to the little room at the back, where Arthur, nearly two years ago, had been introduced by the conductor, Bill Maguire, to Jim Rice and Sam Hicks. Here they pledged each other in somewhat copious draughts of whisky, and then the farmer related to the tradesman all the events that had transpired at Square Mile Farm.

"Poor lads," remarked the storekeeper, after he had listened attentively to every detail, "they ain't had a cheerful time of it, nohow. It's a mystery to me how folks

can send out thar boys to sich places, and allow 'em to be driven like niggers."

"It's a rough life is ours," replied Hicks, "but when it comes to gitting nothing in return for its roughness except kicks and blows, it gits to be past bearing. Howiver, we paid them thieves out, we did. We've abolished boy slavery out thar, and thar ain't no doubt about it."

After some further remarks, the two men walked over to the hotel, and held a consultation with the proprietor, who was a man of very great influence with all the passenger train conductors, as he always provided them with free board and lodging during their sojourn between trips, Fargo being the point at which all hands on Northern Pacific passenger trains are relieved by fresh men.

The manager of a hotel, however, who pursues this generous course, must not be entirely put down as a philanthropist, for in return for the free accommodation which he receives at a hotel, the conductor of a passenger train always remembers the establishment when asked questions by his passengers as to the most convenient or best hostellries at which to stop. The good-

will of the railroad men in Western towns is worth a small fortune to any hotel, for they can send to it, or keep away from it, a vast number of strangers.

Mr Spicer, the manager of this hotel, finally went in search of the conductor who was booked to take out the night passenger express for St Paul, and brought him to his two friends. Then followed a little friendly chat in the bar, and the arrangements for the transportation of Arthur Vallance and his fellow pupils were completed. The conductor had agreed to carry them free to St Paul, and to use his influence with his brother conductors on the Chicago and North-Western Railroad, to get the youths taken on to Chicago.

Arthur Vallance was then summoned, and introduced to the railroadman who was going to interest himself on his behalf.

“This,” said Mr Hicks, drawing the young man forward, “is the boy that split the nigger’s head open, and then rode over the prairie to my place for assistance.”

“I’m proud to know you, sir,” said the conductor, grasping his hand. “I’ll see that you get through to Chicago all right. I’m a Southerner myself, though up here

for many years now, and we never wear crape for a darkie who has been sent to join the majority. I'll carry any man free who reduces the black population."

"It's evident you don't love the black man," said Arthur.

"No, sir; I don't. No Southerner does. It's you English people who don't know him, that are always wanting to make a pet of him."

"We doan't give 'em much chance out my way," remarked Sam Hicks, "but thar's only one or two within a day's journey. This pupil teacher seems to have made his nigger into a sort of jailer and spy."

"That's what he was," said Arthur.

"Wal, he got his reward; they've all got thar rewards."

Then the details of the journey to St Paul were discussed, and the conductor gave Arthur eight old railroad tickets, telling him to hand one to each of his companions, and to instruct them to keep and give them up on the train when asked.

"You see," he said, by way of explanation, "if there were a spotter—a spotter is a spy in the service of the railroad company—on the train, he would see me pass

you boys by, and would report me, giving me credit for having collected your fares in cash before starting, but if he sees me take up your tickets—he can't tell what sort of tickets they are as long as they look like tickets—he can't do anything, because it's impossible for him to count all the passengers on the train, and because I always have a few spare tickets to turn in when necessary. So you give each of your friends one of those, and let them hand them to me when I come through the train to take up tickets, and don't you or any of them talk to strangers."

"But I hope you don't run any risk in doing this for us?" asked Arthur.

"Not a bit, really; but we must take some precautions, because we are not supposed to carry any one without a ticket or payment of fare. We do it every day, though, and always shall, I guess. It's a cold day when the conductor of a passenger train can't carry a friend or two for nothing."

Arthur again expressed his gratitude, and promised that the utmost discretion should be used by all his companions.

That evening, precisely at seven o'clock,

Mr Hicks bade good-bye to his young friend and the other pupils, and saw them safely seated in a carriage of the Eastern night express. He had remained in Fargo the entire afternoon, on purpose to see that they got off all right, and in case Mr Emerson should arrive in pursuit. But the farm pupil teacher had not followed them ; and after cordial hand-shakings, and numerous expressions of best wishes from the little group of men who had heard their story and tried to befriend them, the boys found themselves *en route*.

They had, during this brief stay in a Western town been the recipients of many little kindnesses.

Mr Spicer, the manager of the hotel, had supplied them with a large basket of refreshments, and had furnished Arthur with a letter to his brother, who kept a small hotel in Chicago. Jim Rice had also given them a letter to a friend in the same city, and from out the stock of his store had forced upon them several little presents. Mr Hicks, in addition to all the trouble he had taken, had pressed into Arthur's hands at the very last moment a twenty dollar bill, simply saying,—

"Ye may need it, Arthur; ye've got a deal o' difficulty to fight through yet, and every bit o' help will come in handy. Mind ye writes to me and tells me how ye git on. Ef ye're still in Chicago two months hence, I shall see ye, as I shall be down with cattle."

Then the conductor had waved his hand, the engine had responded with a brief whistle, and the train had slowly rolled out from the station, carrying all the pupils of Square Mile Farm away from the scene of drudgery and misery.

No incident of any note happened during the journey from Fargo to St Paul. The boys all followed Arthur's injunction that they should have nothing to say to any strangers; and they sat together in a group, principally occupying their time in discussing past events and future possibilities. Not one of them regretted the step that had been taken; and as Sam Hicks had waved his last adieu, they had put out their heads and arms through the open windows, and had cheered him lustily, much to the astonishment and amusement of their fellow-passengers.

The conductor of the train showed them the utmost courtesy and kindness all the

way, and did everything in his power to make them comfortable. He sat down by Arthur's side several times, and had chats with him in regard to his plans and prospects, giving the young man some very excellent hints as to his best method of procedure after arriving in Chicago.

Arthur himself had already begun to realise the responsibility of his situation. He felt that he was the recognised leader of this little band of English youths, and that upon him principally would devolve the duties of thought and action, and he therefore received with special gratitude all *bona fide* suggestions and advice which might be likely to benefit him and his friends. Such disinterested kindness as had been bestowed upon him within the last forty-eight hours came as a complete revelation, and showed him how much true humanity and genuine kindness could exist in places where it might be least expected. For Mr Hicks he was full of unbounded admiration, and it was the unanimous opinion of him and his comrades that the Western farmer's uncouth speech and rough, unpolished exterior covered one of the noblest of hearts.

When they arrived in St Paul, the spirit of adventure pervaded their bosoms, and the depression caused by long periods of hopelessness and servile labour had passed away. The conductor took them to an hotel, introduced them to the proprietor, and obtained a promise from him that they should have specially low rates during their brief stay. Having been provided with an excellent breakfast, they all sallied forth, full of spirit and pluck, to have a look at that magnificent city on the bank of the Mississippi, which stands forth as a monument of the wonderful enterprise of the Great North-West.

In the evening they continued their journey to Chicago, the conductor who had brought them from Fargo having succeeded in inducing his brother-conductor in charge of the train by which they were going to travel to carry them free of expense as far as his run extended, and having extracted a promise from him that he would, if possible, persuade his successor on the train to do the same.

Noon of the following day found Arthur Vallance and his comrades safely landed in the city often known as the "Queen of the

Lakes." Unknown to any directors or superintendents or managers, all the way from Fargo to Chicago, they had been the guests of two railroad companies, and had not paid a penny for transportation over a distance of seven hundred miles. For this grand and useful hospitality the conductors were solely responsible, and it was no small credit to these men, for, had they been found out, their assistance to these belated youths might have led to their suspension or dismissal.

Arrived in Chicago, Arthur conducted his little party to a small hotel in Wabash Avenue, where they could get rooms at rather less than a dollar per day each, and which was under the management of Mr Spicer's brother.

The first thing the lads did was to count their respective moneys and see how they stood financially. With the exception of Arthur, each of them now possessed only about twenty-seven dollars—only a trifle more than it would cost them to travel from Chicago to New York. It was plain that, with this scanty sum as their sole means of existence, there was no time to lose before seeking advice and assistance, for the "Queen of the Lakes" is an expensive place in which

to sojourn, and a dollar in that city will go little further than a shilling in England.

It was agreed that on the following morning Arthur should pay a visit to Mr Blanchard, and that if nothing came of that, or if the great railroadman should be absent from town, he and the Summers should lay their case before the British Consul, and also use the letter of introduction furnished by Jim Rice.

CHAPTER XII.

POVERTY AND WEALTH.

It was with some little trepidation and nervousness that Arthur Vallance ascended the front doorsteps of Mr Blanchard's marble palace in Drexel Boulevard and touched the electric bell. There was a regal splendour about the place that almost awed him, and appeared unsurpassed after his long stay at the shabby wooden shed on Square Mile Farm. The railroad king's habitation was the most elaborate and costly of all the millionaires' residences in the "Garden City." Built entirely of white marble, furnished at an unlimited expense, decorated and frescoed by artists imported for the purpose from Paris and Italy, it was an abode calculated to inspire even other millionaires with envy and admiration. There was no vulgarity or bad taste traceable in any part; there was no sacrificing of comfort to ostentation; there was no upstart attempt to create

display, but there was a combination of delicious luxury, with artistic taste and lavish expenditure, that made the place at once a delightful home, as well as a magnificent palace, the garden surrounding the house being in itself a small paradise on earth.

Arthur had scarcely time to glance around him before the door was opened by a portly man-servant dressed in livery.

“Is Mr Blanchard in?” he asked of this functionary, who paused before replying, to marvel at the gentlemanly bearing and speech of the shabbily-clad young man.

“No; he’s gone to his office.”

“Is Miss Blanchard in?”

“Yes; she’s in.”

“Can I see her?”

The man looked him over again, not scornfully or disrespectfully, but with an apparent endeavour to fathom the youth’s status in life, and to ascertain whether it would be right to let him see the young mistress of the house. He was evidently puzzled.

“If you will give me your name I will take it to her,” he finally said, stepping back to admit Arthur into the hall, and

closing the door as soon as the visitor had entered.

“Arthur Vallance is my name, and pray tell her I wish very much to see her. She will probably remember me.”

The servant repeated the name to make sure that he had heard it correctly, and then went off to seek his mistress, leaving Arthur standing in the hall, with another liveried individual keeping an eye on his movements.

In a few minutes the man returned, and requested Arthur to follow him. Then Vallance was conducted across a large hall, which, for the tastefulness of its architecture, the perfection of all its appointments, and the beauty of its decorations, eclipsed anything of which he had ever even read, and, passing through an ante-room, he found himself in a boudoir, where, by an open bay window, was sitting a young lady, a handsome mastiff lying at her feet.

He at once recognised Cora Blanchard, and the smile which played over her face as she rose from her chair reassured him that she was still his friend, and that he had not been forgotten.

“Better late than never,” she said, holding

out her hand. "I have often wondered what fate had overtaken you, but I had certainly given up all hope of ever knowing. Have you been prospering?"

"Do I look like it?" he asked bitterly, glancing down at his coarse, well-worn trousers. "Does my appearance indicate that the world has been lavish in its blessings to me?"

The girl looked him over, but for a moment made no response. The contrast between the two was striking in the extreme as they faced each other in that exquisitely-furnished apartment. He, with his badly-fitting jacket of common material, patched by his own hands at each elbow, his rough, colourless flannel shirt, boots which had never known blacking, and trousers that had been mended and patched until they looked something like a quilt of varied pieces, appeared the very personification of poverty and hardship; while she, in a dainty morning gown of finest texture, her fingers glistening with jewels, and her carefully-arranged hair shimmering in the sunlight which streamed through the window, seemed a veritable daughter of Croesus. The appearance of each was intensified by that of the other.

He seemed shabbier and more dilapidated as he stood before her, while she took on a richer and more regal appearance. His sunburnt features looked more sunburnt than ever as they came into proximity with her delicate pink complexion, and his brown hands grew larger and browner than ever besides her dainty little ones with their tapering fingers.

The mastiff also was apparently struck by the contrast, or by the fact that the visitor was something different to those usually admitted to this room, for he walked round him two or three times, sniffing at him in an inquisitive but not unfriendly manner.

“Sit down and tell me all about it,” Miss Blanchard said, motioning him to a chair immediately opposite that on which she had been sitting. Then an idea entered her head, and she asked, half-shyly,—

“Will you have something to eat or drink?”

He blushed crimson at this offer, for he saw at once that she thought he was hungry — perhaps starving.

“Thanks,” he answered; “I have had breakfast.”

"Well, we'll have a pint of champagne, anyhow," she replied, walking across the room and touching an electric bell.

Then she resumed her seat in the window, he sitting down immediately opposite to her, and in a minute or two a servant brought a small silver tray, bearing two glasses and a pint of "Mumm," and placed it on the table between them.

"The web of life is of a mingled yarn," she quoted. "Tell me your yarn now. I am all attention. Drink that glass of champagne first; it will revive you and give you nerve."

He did as she bade him, and for the first time in his life tasted the wine that is the fashionable beverage throughout the world. Then he related to her his entire history from the time when they had parted in New York to that moment.

She lay back in her chair, her hands lying idly in her lap, and her feet resting lightly on the mastiff, listening attentively, but making no comments. Two or three times a little grunt of disgust or anger sounded through her lips, and her right foot gave a convulsive little kick in the air, but beyond that she maintained perfect silence

and absolute composure. When he had finished, she sat straight up, and said,—

“It is the most infamous thing I ever heard. If I ever see Sam Hicks, I’ll ask him to dinner. But why have you endured it so long? Why did you not call on me for assistance before?”

“It is not so easy to ask young ladies for assistance; it required a good deal of effort on my part to come to you in this condition. Besides, I did not know but that you might be married, and would not wish to be bothered by me.”

“You were very wrong and very silly. The fetters of marriage are not likely to be welded round me. It is a grand thing to be an heiress, but it is a thing that will debar a sensible woman from linking her life with that of any man. I have everything in the world but a husband, and caution and knowledge of the world compel me to the conclusion that I will be better off without one. When I was in Europe I had so many princely and noble lovers that they quite disgusted me with marriage.”

“But some of them must like you for yourself.”

“That is a thing a girl can never tell. I

once had an offer of marriage from a French Duke whom I had never seen. He had heard how rich I was, and having failed to get an introduction, wrote to me, placing his hand and title at my disposal. No, I intend to remain a spinster, and a very jolly old maid I shall be. But to return to your affairs. Father must be consulted at once ; he is quite infallible in dealing with young men's difficulties."

"I suppose the only thing to do will be to assist us all to get back to England."

"I don't know. Do you pine for your native land ?"

"Not much ; but what could I do here ? Besides, you know, I have never heard from Violet, and I want to find out what has become of her."

"Ah, yes ; I remember about Violet. It is two years since you have seen her, is it not ?"

"Yes, or heard from her."

"Poor fellow ! I would not like to venture an opinion, but it is just possible she may have jilted you. She was very young, you know."

"Yes, but she knew no one but me ; she had no friends ; she never went anywhere. There was some mystery about her mother, but I never knew what. She told me that if

anything should ever happen to her—if she should die, I suppose she meant—I was to look after Violet, and she told me where I would find a box with all her papers."

"Certainly that sounds like a mystery. You were very young to have such responsibilities placed upon you. One would have supposed she would have selected a man of more experience."

"She didn't seem to know any men, and she knew how I loved Violet, and felt sure that I would be true to the trust."

"Then how do you account for her conduct now?"

"I can't account for it. I can only fear that something has happened to them. I intend some day to find out the cause of it—as soon as I can get to England."

"And suppose you go to England and find out that they are just as you left them, and that they have purposely avoided writing to you for reasons of their own?"

"What sort of reasons?"

"There might be some reasons which they may only have learnt after your departure. You don't know the mystery of that lady's life; it might be such as to compel her to separate you from her daughter."

Arthur pondered. There was something in this last suggestion that gave him pain, and at the same time seemed very much within the realm of possibility.

Cora Blanchard meditatively studied his features as they almost revealed to her the workings of his mind, and then she let her eyes roam once more over his rough-looking and shabbily clad figure. A new idea suddenly entered her head, and her eyes sparkled with animation.

“Look here,” she said, leaning towards him, “among my small number of accomplishments I include painting. I want to paint a portrait of you just as you are now. Will you accept an engagement as my model?”

“No;” he answered sharply. “Some day I hope to get out of these rags and to clothe myself as a gentleman, and then I shall never want to be reminded of this dark period of my existence.”

“I wont urge you,” she said gently, “but there is something picturesque about your appearance as you now are that attracts my artist’s eye. However, I will not mention it again. Believe me that I regard you as just as much a gentleman in those clothes, and in your impecunious condition as I regard my-

self as a lady in this gown and surrounded by all this wealth."

"You are very kind," he answered in a mollified tone, "and I am only a bear. I wonder what your servants think of your strange visitor?"

"My servants never think anything about what I do. They are well treated and well paid, but both my father and myself require that they have no opinions, and no talk about either of us. There is, even in this age of socialism and radicalism, virtue in the actions of a millionaire or a millionairess. Rich men or women can do no wrong in the eyes of those who depend upon them."

"If they were all like you, they would do an awful lot of good. It seems strange that one in your position should take any interest in an unfortunate poor devil like myself."

"Devils never enter this room, so you must find some other expression to apply to yourself. You needn't be morbid or disconsolate. You have shown yourself a man with a good deal of grit, and you mustn't talk as if you were not."

"I am not exactly disconsolate; but imagine an English gentleman being compelled

to seek assistance in this manner and this plight. It is mortifying."

"Mortifying to pride, perhaps, but then you know, '*Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*'"

"It would be difficult for me to fall now," he replied, with a smile momentarily flitting across his features. "No one can fall lower than the bottom."

"Don't talk nonsense. If you will listen to me and my father, you will find that so far from being at the bottom, you will soon be a rising man. Say what you will, your life of hardships during these two years has greatly tended to develop manliness and self-reliance in you. Always look up; never look down."

"You forget that, as a boy, I was always taught to look down—that I was always given to understand that the lower regions must be my final home."

"I know that; and very wrong it was. But now tell me the truth. Have not your own reasoning powers and your own instincts convinced you by this time that such a teaching is a fallacy—the pure creation of certain narrow, distorted, and intolerant minds? Have you not in your own heart

entirely discarded those ideas ? Have they not absolutely ceased to enter your mind, except as reminiscences of the past ? ”

“ Yes ; I believe they have, although occasionally, I can’t help reflecting on them.”

“ But when you reflect on them, does not your own mind at once condemn them as preposterous frauds ? ”

“ Yes ; everything seems to contradict them. Even you, looking so sweet and pretty, and taking so much interest in my woes, seem to rise up as a proof of their falseness.”

“ In other words, I am an angel assisting to cast a devil out of you, eh ? That’s a charming bit of flattery, anyhow, and sounds pleasant, coming fresh off the prairie.”

“ You ministered to my woebegone mind when we were on board ship, and now you are doing it again.”

“ As you please. However, as your adviser, then, I must insist on coming back to the subject of affairs. How much money have you ? ”

“ A little over forty dollars. The others have only about twenty-five each, but Sam Hicks gave me twenty.”

“ It was real good of him. Now, you take

that forty dollars and go and buy a new suit of clothes, a hat, a collar, a pair of boots, and a shirt."

"But I shall have nothing left?"

"Never mind that; do as I tell you. You are going to dine here to-night with my father and myself, and you can't dine in that garb. I am going to see you out of this dilemma, so you needn't be afraid to accept my advice."

"It seems risky to spend one's last penny on a suit of clothes; but I'll do it."

"Of course you will. See that they fit you, and come back here as soon as you have got them—wearing them, of course. I'll take you out for a drive this afternoon and show you the beauties of the town. First, you had better go to your companions and tell them that you are making progress. To-night, father and I will see what should be done. We can easily arrange matters. He can find employment for a hundred men at an hour's notice."

Then she gave him directions as to the shop to which he should go for his new clothes, and finally taking him out through the window, walked across the garden with him and showed him through him the gate

into the street. She seemed no more ashamed to walk with him publicly, poorly dressed as he was, than if he had been attired in the latest fashion. Two or three passers-by slackened their paces, and stared when they saw the heiress quietly shaking hands at her gate with a young man whose appearance denoted depths of poverty, but their action did not even seem to attract her attention.

CHAPTER XIII.

ARTHUR RECEIVES SOME ADVICE.

WHEN Vallance left Miss Cora Blanchard he felt more sanguine and cheerful than he had felt for many a day. There was something magnetic and catching about this young lady that seemed to imbue every one about her with her own bright and animated spirits, but, in addition to this, she had sent him away with the assurance that she was going to pull him through his dilemmas, and he was perfectly confident in both her intention and ability to do so.

He could not help feeling that, after all, the world was not so dark, for did it not contain a Cora Blanchard, a Sam Hicks, a Jim Rice, and a Bill Macguire, to say nothing of the beautiful little girl of River Lawn, who had once been the sole pleasure of his existence, but now, in some way or other, seemed to have passed out of his life? Such per-

sons as Miss Blanchard, Violet Carlisle, and Mr Hicks could atone, he felt, for the presence of may such creatures as the Emersons and their kindred.

He sauntered up the boulevard with a firm and confident tread, holding his head erect, and caring nothing for the curious glances with which many people eyed him. For the first time he felt almost ambitious. Cora Blanchard had praised him for having shown grit, and had said that he might soon be a rising man. Why should he not be? Why should he drudge along in despair and discontent, never looking for a future in this world, and often fearing that in the next? The opportunity to rise was, perhaps, about to be offered to him. Why not, he thought, avail himself of it? Why go back, even if he could do so, to that austere and gloomy life which had been his during childhood and boyhood? Why not trust to himself and his own efforts, and to those humane people who would certainly see him launched on some career, rather than to his dismal and unkind relative, and the small income which would eventually be his?

The last question had not yet received a satisfactory answer when he found himself

at his hotel, and in the midst of his companions.

"A weight of care has been lifted from your brow," cried Fred Summers, the moment he saw his leader, "there is a look of success in your face which bids us all cheer up."

"Yes, boys," he answered, "the tide is changing. I believe I have found a friend who will see us safely through these difficulties. I have just come to tell you that things are looking hopeful, and I have got to go out again."

"Alone?" asked Fred.

"Not necessarily, you and Harry come with me."

The three set out together, and, during the walk, Arthur told his companions of what he had done, and what he hoped to do. He did not repeat all his conversation with Miss Blanchard, but he assured them that her father was the richest and most influential man in Chicago, and that he was completely under the thumb of his daughter.

When they entered the tailor's shop to which Arthur had been recommended, and the two Summers's heard their leader ask for a suit of ready-made clothes, they were taken completely by surprise.

"Are you going to expend all your substance on your back, and keep nothing for the inner man?" asked Fred, adding, as Arthur smiled at the question, "this comes of a visit to a pretty girl so early in the morning. What recklessness?"

"She told me to do it," Arthur replied, "and as I am going to dine with her and her father it was a very useful admonition. How would this coat and shirt look at a millionaire's dinner-table?"

"But she didn't know you had only forty dollars in the world?"

"Yes, she did. She asked how much I had, and I told her. She then said, 'Go and buy a suit of clothes, a hat, a collar, a shirt, and a pair of boots,' and you see I've come."

"You've great confidence in her."

"My faith in her is as implicit as a Jesuit's in his religion."

"I expect you are right," remarked Harry Summers. "You couldn't dine with a girl like that dressed in such rags as compose our wardrobes, and it might ruin your hopes not to dine with her."

"Spend the money, and trust to luck and your friends," said Fred. "We'll always divide what we've got with you if you fail."

“Thanks,” answered Vallance; “it appears to me that when a fellow’s sole worldly capital is reduced to forty dollars, other measures than cautious expenditure become necessary. I shall trust to luck, Miss Blanchard, and myself. I do not believe that we fellows are destined to perish here, and if we are it won’t be without a struggle.”

Then they inspected various suits of clothes, and after a careful examination and much discussion several were chosen to be tried on, the final result being that Arthur Vallance emerged from the store completely transformed and changed.

From the outfitter’s he went to a boot-maker’s and a hatter’s, and finished his shopping by turning into a barber’s and having his hair cut and his face shaved. So complete then was the transformation, that it is doubtful if the Emerson’s, or even Sam Hicks, would have recognised him. The long untidy hair was now closely cropped, and the scanty, straggling whiskers and beard were removed, leaving no hirsute adornment to his features, except a small neat moustache on his upper lip. As he regarded himself in a looking glass, he was astonished at the manner in which a little

grooming and a change of attire had converted a rough awkward youth into a gentlemanly-looking young man, but reflected with satisfaction that now no blushes need suffuse his face when Mr. Blanchard's hall porter opened the door to him, and that he could sit opposite the millionaire's daughter without wishing to sink through the floor or hide behind a screen.

Early in the afternoon he left his companions, and again betook himself to the mansion on Drexel Boulevard. The stoic hall porter betrayed no surprise when he opened the door and beheld the extraordinary alteration that had taken place in the outward appearance of the visitor. When asked if Miss Blanchard were in, he answered in the affirmative, and led Arthur to the same room in which he had been received in the morning.

Cora Blanchard was there, putting some flowers in vases, and at once stopped her occupation to survey the young man critically. Coolly, but with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, she looked him over from head to foot.

"You'll do very nicely," she said slowly. "You are not as picturesque as you were—in

fact, you look now like an every-day sort of young man—but you'll do."

"I must confess I feel very much the better for the change of raiment," he replied, "you can't imagine how trying it was to come into your presence, shabby and dilapidated as I was this morning."

"You didn't look as if you appreciated it, but I admired you all the same. It would not have been a bad idea for the outfitter to have had you photographed in your old clothes and then again in your new, and to have put the pictures in the papers as an advertisement, with, 'before patronising our establishment' printed under the first, and 'after patronising our establishment' under the second. That would have been a real clever notion."

"It wouldn't have been pleasant for me."

"Oh, you wouldn't have minded, because no one could have recognised the pictures after the newspapers had copied them."

"I should have recognised them myself, and they would have continually reminded me of a period that it will be pleasanter to forget."

"Forgetfulness is not difficult at your age, although, to do you credit, it must be said that you have not forgotten your Vie."

“No, and I never shall. She was the first person for whom I ever felt any affection, and she came like a bright ray of sunshine into my dull and gloomy existence.”

“In other words—

‘*The world was sad, the garden was a wild,
And man, the hermit, sighed—till woman smil’d.*’

You were the man.”

“I believe it. But woman’s smiles have been scarce with me in the last two years. They were never very plentiful before.”

“They were plentiful enough when you were in Chicago last, I guess. For instance, how much better off you would have been if Minnie Sharp had never smiled upon you. But for her you might have had money enough to leave Square Mile Farm long long ago. Think, of all that has arisen through her bewitching smiles: two years of drudgery and imprisonment for you, a negro rightfully killed, a farm pupil teacher exposed, flogged, and burnt out. All that would never have taken place if Miss Sharp had not fascinated you with her pretty face.”

“I was then only a boy. I had seen and admired you, and I thought other women would be like you. I knew so little about women.”

"Do you know much now?" she asked, with a bright laugh. "Do you think that contact with Miss Sharp, Sal Emerson, and myself, has revealed to you that most impenetrable of all mysteries, woman's character. Alas! the characters of women are as varied and miscellaneous as are the natures and attributes of all the fruits, flowers, and herbs of this planet."

"Still, I must know a little more about them than I did."

"Perhaps you do, but it is waste of time to make them a study. That budding moustache of yours will have grown white, and that head, covered with thick glossy hair, become a bald cranium, before you will have acquired any great knowledge of them. They are something like electricity—virtually unknown, but with great prospects before them."

Arthur smiled. He knew what she said was true, and that his knowledge both of woman and the world was very limited.

"Would you like to take a drive with me this afternoon?" she asked, apparently concluding that enough had been said about her sex. "I can take you behind the fastest pair of trotters in town, and I can show

you one of the prettiest drives in the world."

"I should like it immensely."

"All right, we'll go. I suppose you are not afraid to entrust yourself in my hands? I have the reputation of being as good a whip as there is in town, man or woman, and as to any fear of my carrying you off, I am the best 'catch' in the State."

"I can quite believe it. Very few men would object to being carried off by you."

"That's very nice; you are coming on, young man. Perhaps, when you have been in my company for three hours more without any means of escape or any other companion, you may think differently."

"I think not. Do you drive alone?"

"Alone with you. Are you frightened?"

"No, but I didn't know whether you took a groom or coachman."

"Neither groom, coachman, nor chaperon. I never destroy my pleasure by having a third person present. In England you always do."

"I believe so, when a young lady is in the question."

"Oh, I know all about it. Your girls have no more liberty over there than the

slaves of the Sultan. Here we do as we please ; we are independent ; we are jolly ; we are able to take care of ourselves ; we need no dowagers or matrons to keep a watchful eye on our every motion. Our liberty gives us confidence in ourselves, and the chivalry of our men is one of our greatest safeguards. There is, it is true, an office in town which supplies chaperons, at so much a day, to those who want them, but the company is not doing well. We girls don't take well to chaperons of any sort—especially hired ones. We are queens here, not slaves of conventionalities."

"It must be much jollier, but I am sure in England people would gossip awfully at it. My aunt is fearfully proper, and thinks all girls should be seen and not heard, and only seen even in the wake of a chaperon."

"I know ; and that is why we are more popular than your girls. Of course, in all parts of the world, there are women who delight in scandal, and in stabbing their fellow-women in the back, but there are fewer of these in this country than in yours, although we girls who are generally the scapegoats have so much more liberty. Remember what Hamlet said to Ophelia—

*'Be thou chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny.'*

Hamlet was right. No woman worthy of notice in any way can entirely escape calumny."

"Every woman must have an enemy or two somewhere, I suppose, and the tongue is, of course, a woman's weapon."

"Right you are, indeed. Show me a woman without a single enemy among her own sex, and I'll show you an insipid fool who has never attracted the attention of a man. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go and put on my hat. The buggy will be ready in a minute."

A quarter of an hour later Arthur found himself sitting beside Miss Cora Blanchard in one of the neatest buggies ever turned out of a coach-builder's shop. The young lady was holding the reins, deftly guiding the two high-stepping chestnuts which drew the vehicle through the maze of carriages in Madison Street. It was evident to Vallance that his companion was both a popular and a well-known personage in her native town, for he noticed that she was continually bowing right and left, and that at every few yards, off would come some man's hat. As they were turning a corner into State Street, she said,—

“I must give you a little lesson in etiquette. Instead of staring at people who bow to me, you must raise your hat to them. That is one of the customs of our society which must be implicitly obeyed.”

“I beg your pardon,” he replied; “I never thought of it. There is so little hat-raising to be done in Dakota. We never took off our hats to Sal.”

“I should say not.”

At this moment she reined up her horses outside a large store, and having succeeded with some difficulty in bringing them to a standstill, said,—

“I see you have no gloves. Jump down, and go in there and get a pair.”

Arthur did as he was instructed, and was soon again sitting by her side, his big brown hands concealed in a pair of calf-skin gloves. She looked at him approvingly, made a slight noise with her lips, and the horses started off at a rattling rate down the street.

“You have been beyond the pale of civilisation for so long that you must forgive me for giving you these little hints,” she said good-naturedly. “One forgets these kind of things after a sojourn of two years on the prairies. I am no stickler for etiquette, and I despise

conventionality, but there is a certain respect for appearances which is indispensable. Gloves are as necessary to the make-up of a gentleman as are boots."

"To a gentleman, yes," replied Arthur; "but how can a poor devil like me pretend to be a gentleman?"

"Your day will come, if you will only have patience and not look down upon yourself. You have far more to be proud of than ashamed of. You have stood the test of two years' severe hardships, and in a great emergency you showed yourself possessed of resolution and pluck. Be ambitious, young man, and give up longing to pass through life in a dressing-gown and slippers. The whole of life is before you."

"I was almost thinking so after I left you this morning, but it seems to me that before you commence to climb a ladder you've got to find a ladder to climb."

"I'll find the ladder, if you'll promise to climb it," she answered briskly. "No young man, with *bona fide* intentions and wishes to get on in this world, ever applied to father in vain. You've got me, too, at your back, and I am no little person here."

"I am sure of that. But are you serious in

suggesting that I should get something to do here instead of going home?"

"Certainly I am. What good can you do by going home? You are not of age, and you can only loaf about in an obscure country place at your uncle's pleasure. You are entitled, you say, to about ten thousand pounds when you are twenty-five. Very well, suppose you are. What interest can you get on that in England? Four hundred a year, about. Just enough to keep you in a miserable and useless idleness."

"A fellow can live very comfortably in England on four hundred a year, I believe."

"Not if he is without occupation, he can't. Loafing is the most expensive thing in the world. An idle man, with only four hundred a year, is little more than an animal. A man who works and earns four hundred a year is a superior being to him altogether. Go to serious work now, and by the time you get that ten thousand pounds you will have acquired a knowledge and experience that will enable you to use it to great advantage."

"I really believe you are right; but what about, Vie? I would like to make some inquiries about her. You see, I don't know what may have happened to her."

“We can make inquiries from here quite easily. It would be folly for you to go back solely on that account. Besides, what can you do in your position? Suppose you go back, you are entirely dependent on your uncle. My father would say to you, ‘Woo fortune, young man, first, and when you’ve wooed and won her, then woo your girl.’”

“I’ll do it,” he said resolutely, turning and looking his companion frankly in the face, “I’ll do it.”

“That’s right. An independent spirit is sure to lead to success.”

“Whether I rise or fall, I shall always remember with gratitude the kindness and consolation I have received from you.”

“Very pretty, indeed; but you are not going to fall.”

Then holding out her right hand towards the horses, she continued,—

“You see that little hand? If you fall twenty times, so long as you still endeavour to rise, it shall help you up again.”

They were out in the country now, far away from the brick and mortar of the city.

“Thanks,” he replied eagerly, impulsively reaching forth, taking hold of the outstretched hand and drawing it near to him, kissing the

little bit of white wrist which peeped out between her glove and the edge of her sleeve. “Thanks, you are an angel.”

“What do you think your Vie would say if she saw you do that?” asked Miss Cora, extricating her hand from his grasp and reaching for her whip.

“She wouldn’t mind, if she knew how good you are.”

“Wouldn’t she? Then she is a little idiot. But I expect you are mistaken—that is, if she still likes you.”

“I don’t think I am. But will you answer me one question?”

“If it be a proper one, and one entitled to an answer.”

“What first made you take an interest in me, and what now makes you so resolved to help me?”

“Those are two questions, but I don’t mind answering them. I took an interest in you because you were different to any boy I had ever before come across, and because you seemed lonely and miserable, and very inclined to take gloomy and wrong views of life; also, because you were the greenest youth I had ever met.”

“That was not my fault.”

“Certainly not. I saw at once that your whole training had been wrong, and that you were not fit to be sent away all alone as you were. Then,” and here she looked at him with a roguish expression in her eyes, “there was something about yourself that attracted me, and made me take a fancy to you.”

“It’s awfully good of you to say that; but I feel now that I must have been an ignorant young cub then. I had never been out like other fellows.”

“That was what made you so fresh and unconventional—so different to the every-day young man. And then, there was that nightmare about Hell that seemed almost to torture you at times, and about which you so frankly unbosomed yourself to me. That was something so new to me that I couldn’t help being interested, especially as you were so very, very serious about it.”

“And what made you, after these two long and dreary years, so ready to come to my rescue again?”

“Because I had never forgotten you or lost my original interest in you, and because one of the greatest pleasure of my life is to do good to my fellow creatures. When you came to me in that strange garb this morning I at

once entered you in the list of my *protégés*, and resolved to see what I could do to promote your welfare. Years hence, when you have become a successful man, I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that it was I who first started you on the road. That will be my reward."

"I have never met anyone like you before."

"There never was but one Cora Blanchard. A young old maid with a very big heart, having fortunately the means to gratify every whim and charitable wish, and a father who takes an interest in everything she does."

"Your heart is as noble as your face is beautiful," said Arthur, half timidly, for he had not yet attained that stage when he could pour forth volumes of compliments without a falter or blush.

"That is not badly put," she said, smiling quizzingly into his face ; "but there is a timidity about your manner that betokens great earnestness. I think we had better be friends and not have any flattery. I will give you plenty of advice, but you must not repay me in compliments. Be the same original youth that you were when I first met you, and don't drift into the wearying, tedious methods of the ordinary 'masher.' I detest 'mashers.'"

“ To tell the truth, I don’t know what they are.”

“ A ‘masher’ is a young or old man displaying an abundance of collar and cuff, wearing a stereotyped smile, speaking with a hideous drawl, uttering only a certain number of stupid commonplace phrases, who believes that every girl he sees is a victim to his fascinations, and that the greatest art in life is to be loudly dressed. Most mashers wear their hats on their left ears, and when talking to girls in the streets suck the ends of their canes.”

“ I feel sure that I shall never merit your enmity by joining their ranks.”

“ No, I don’t intend that you shall. Your head is not empty enough for that, though you are at an age when associations will greatly influence you.”

Then Miss Blanchard changed the subject, and gave Arthur a brief account of the phenomenal growth of her native city, telling him how her father had worked and plodded there as a boy when it was only a small town, long before the great fire of 1871 came to destroy more than three-quarters of its buildings.

“ And now,” she said, as they were driving beside Lake Michigan, pointing her whip over the water towards the great metropolis, “ you

see there the result of the indomitable energy and perseverance of the West. In 1871 that place was almost destroyed, 150,000 people being rendered homeless, and over 12,000 private dwellings being burnt down, to say nothing of banks, stores, and churches ; but in two years there had risen up a new city. Then again, in 1874, came another terrible fire, and once more the Chicagoans were in the midst of ruin and devastation ; but a second time there rose up from the wreck more splendid buildings than before, and, undaunted and never discouraged, my townsmen fought along, until now we are the second biggest and richest city on this continent, and shall soon be the first. My father was one of those who have taken a foremost part in rebuilding the fortunes of Chicago."

"I don't wonder you are proud of him."

"Proud of him I am, for there are few his equal. But does it not stimulate and encourage you to take a prominent place in the battle of life, when you see the result of the energy and pluck of my fellow-citizens ? Twice has this place been visited with ruin and disaster, but each time it has overcome all obstacles and reared its head more proudly than ever. Since the fire of London in 1666,

there never was such a fire as the one that destroyed this city in 1871, but the ashes were hardly cold before its citizens were beginning to rebuild it. That is the sort of stuff we are made of out here."

"And a very good stuff, too. Such a calamity as that makes one's own little troubles dwindle into insignificance."

"So it should. You see I have not taken you up on to a mount to tempt you; I have only brought you to the lakeside to give you an object lesson in perseverance, enterprise, and indomitable energy."

"For which I am immensely obliged, as you have given me both great pleasure and much useful instruction. What a lucky thing it was for me that I met you on board."

"There is no such thing as luck."

C H A P T E R X I V.

“WHAT CAN YOU DO?”

WHEN Arthur and Miss Blanchard returned from their drive it was nearly eight o'clock, and within a few minutes of dinner time. As they entered the hall they met the young lady's father, to whom Vallance had to be formally introduced, the railway king having apparently forgotten him altogether.

After this ceremony had been satisfactorily performed and a few commonplace remarks had passed, Cora, begging Arthur to excuse her for a few minutes, linked her arm in that of her parent and led him away to her own boudoir, where she related to him the history of the young man in whom she was taking so great an interest, and also told of the seven other farm pupils who had run away and were now almost destitute in the city.

Mr Blanchard listened with attention, but made no remark until his daughter had finished her story. Then he said—

“There must be good stuff in that lad somewhere. We ought to be able to do something for him. What do you propose?”

“I propose that you find him a position where he will have a good chance to rise.”

“You don’t want to lend him money to go home?”

“Oh, dear, no. If he goes home now he’ll be spoilt. Besides, after the wild life he has led since coming to this country, he would never be content to return to the tame existence he has described to me.”

“Which does he want to do?”

“If he can get an opening he’s willing to take it and stay.”

“And what about the others?”

“You must use your influence on their behalf. Find employment for those who want it, and send those home who want to go.”

“It’s a large order, my girl; but I guess it can be done.”

“It must be done, father; you know you can get them passed to New York for nothing, and their fares across the Atlantic won’t cost very much. I am willing to pay them myself.”

“Your pocket is only a sieve, Cora—you shake the money out as fast as I put it in.”

“What does it matter, so long as you keep on putting it in ? We get richer every year, in spite of my expenditure.”

“We do, thank goodness. And nothing that you ever want for charity shall be grudged you, my girl,” he replied, taking her face between his hands and bending down and kissing her. Then he added : “We’ll talk with this young man after dinner, and see what he’s fit for. As for the others, find out what they desire, and anything you want done I’ll do.”

“Thanks ; and now I am going to get ready for dinner. You look after Arthur.”

She flitted out of the room, and entering the lift, was taken up to her own apartment.

No further mention was made of Arthur’s affairs until dinner was over, and the servants had left the room. As soon, however, as the door had closed behind the domestics, and no one was present except the father and daughter and the young Englishman, Mr Blanchard broached the subject.

“Well, young man,” he commenced, “my daughter has been telling me your experiences out in Dakota, and your present predicament. Now, we’ll do the best we can for you. What do you suggest ?”

“I think,” replied Arthur, “that if you can

help me to get some employment it would be best for me. I have talked it over with Miss Blanchard, and she does not advise me to go home at present."

"No more do I. What sort of employment would you prefer?"

"I am willing to take anything I can get."

"What can you do?"

This was a poser for Vallance. What could he do when he had never been trained for anything—when his education had consisted solely of a limited amount of classics, and a still more limited amount of mathematics, and a two years' drudgery on a far Western farm? He paused in embarrassment and considered.

"I don't suppose he has ever been taught anything that would be of use to him in earning a living," interposed Cora, coming to his relief. "Most young Englishmen who are sent out here, are sent out utterly destitute of any practical knowledge or requirements that could possibly be of any use."

"That's quite true," said her father. "The training which they seem to give boys over there is not only valueless when they come to fight their way in the world, but it is even calculated to unfit them for the battle. A good English mechanic has a thousand chances

in his favour to one that the son of an English gentleman has.”

“I was never taught anything that could be of much use here,” said Arthur. “A little Latin and Greek, history, and a few mathematics comprise my stock in trade.”

“I never learnt a word of Latin or Greek in my life,” said the millionaire; “but I was making my own way when I was twelve years old. You are not too old to begin, though. I suppose you know nothing of book-keeping?”

“Not a thing.”

“There are lots of things I could put you in as a beginner. Your salary will of course be small at anything. I could get you into a stockbroker’s easily enough, or into a bank, or into one of the offices of the railroad, or into some wholesale house. I daresay I could get you on the police force, if you liked.”

“A policeman’s lot is not a happy one,” laughed Cora; “especially in Chicago, where Anarchists throw bombs at them, and every thief or burglar shoots at them; I will answer for Arthur and decline that post.”

“I wouldn’t recommend it myself,” returned Mr Blanchard; “but still there are a good many worse berths than that of a Chicago policeman.”

"Not many more adventurous, I think," replied his daughter; "but I am going to make a suggestion, which is a good one, I think. Get him a position which will enable him to travel about and see something of people and the world. Don't tie him down in an office or bank yet. The finest thing in the world for him would be to travel about a bit."

"You're a philosopher, my girl, as well as a walking dictionary of quotations. I guess you're right. A little travel would do him a sight of good. It's a great educator is travel —better than all your books and midnight oil. It seems to take all the warp and smallness out of a man's mind."

"I am sure it does; and it will be the very thing for him. But what can you get him in that line?"

"I'll have to think. I could get him in as a clerk in a hotel, but then he wouldn't be travelling."

"No, he would see plenty of travellers, but wouldn't be one himself."

"I have it. I'll get him on as a sleeping car conductor in the Pullman. He'll have plenty of travel there, and long distances, too. It'll bring him in contact with crowds of

strangers as well. That's the very thing for him."

"What do you say to that?" asked Cora of Arthur.

"I am ready for anything," he answered.
"What sort of work is it?"

"Not hard at all," said Mr Blanchard, "though the runs are very long sometimes. A sleeping car conductor is the person in charge of the sleepers on a train. Each sleeping car has a porter attached to it, but one conductor generally has to look after all the sleepers on one train. The duties are not heavy. They consist principally of collecting the tickets and fares from the passengers while *en route*, and seeing that the cars are kept clean and comfortable, and the passengers properly waited on by the porters. He also has to attend to the supplies for the cars, make reports of the condition of cars under his charge, specially report damage by accident, and so on."

"It doesn't sound very difficult when one gets accustomed to it. No doubt it would take a little time to learn?"

"Of course; but you would be put on one of the lighter trains first. You couldn't be put on such a train, for instance, as the Limited

Express between Chicago and New York, where the work is very arduous, and you are on duty for twenty-four hours at a stretch. The whole of that train is sleeping cars, and the conductor goes the entire distance with it, and it is always full."

"It's a splendid way of seeing America," said Cora; "and father can always get you transferred from one run to another whenever you want a change. The Pullman cars are in use on nearly every railroad in America, except on the Vanderbilt lines, and you can be sent everywhere, and see every town in the country."

"I think it sounds very inviting," said Arthur, whose spirits had been rapidly rising. "I believe I shall like being on the road, and I suppose there is a chance of promotion."

"You do your duty and get on, and I'll see to your chances of rising," said the railway king. "Your pay will not be handsome, although it is not mean. Seventy-five dollars a month is what you'll get—fifteen pounds in English money; but you'll find the hotels and restaurants on the roads always give you greatly reduced prices, and very often feed or lodge you for nothing. They do this expect-

ing that you use your interest with passengers on their behalf. I agree with Cora, and think it is the best thing for the present.”

“I am sure it is,” said Arthur, “and I am ready to go at it at once.”

“Well, I’ll take you down to the general superintendent’s office to-morrow, and as soon as you’ve got your uniform they’ll have a run for you.”

Arthur’s face fell at the mention of a uniform. He remembered that the outfit he was then wearing had that day reduced his capital to the sum of three dollars. He felt as if it would be almost impossible to ask these good people who were doing so much for him to advance him money.

The millionaire seemed almost to have divined his thoughts, for he remarked jocularly.

“You needn’t look so down in the mouth, if you’re thinking of the price of the uniform. My daughter here keeps a loan office and neither takes security nor charges interest.”

“We’ll arrange about everything that you will require,” Cora said; “this little scheme of mine is not going to fall through for want of a few clothes, and don’t you think it.”

“It’s a terrible thing to be so hard up,”

replied Arthur, "but better days are approaching. I shall come out all right."

"That's the way to talk, young man," said Mr Blanchard, looking at the youth approvingly. "Never say die; always go straight; fear nobody; never insult a beggar, nor cringe to a millionaire or a duke."

"Well done, father!" exclaimed Cora, "you would have made such a good preacher. It does me good to hear a millionaire say 'never cringe to a millionaire.' Still, it is excellent advice. Sycophancy towards those richer or higher in social station is as contemptible as arrogance towards those poorer or lower in life. The toadyism I used to see in Europe was absolutely sickening."

"Yes, there's a good crop of it over there, but it'll die out in time. There's plenty of it here, too, though nothing like as much. Is it settled then that our young friend is to go into the Pullman Company?"

"Is it?" asked Cora, looking at Arthur.

"Yes; if you please," was the reply; "I don't know that I would like anything better at present."

"Very well," said Mr Blanchard, "then you meet me to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock in the main doorway of the Pullman building.

Anyone will show you where it is. You are not a quarter of a mile away from it at your hotel. By twelve o'clock you shall have an appointment as a conductor."

"And what about my friends? I mustn't forget them."

"After we've been to the Pullman people, I'll come round with you to see all these runaway pupils. I daresay I can fix them up all right. There's a vacancy in a bank, of which I am a vice-president, for a young fellow about fourteen or thereabouts. It might suit one of them. The only drawback is you English lads write such awful hands."

"I know I do."

"Well, I suppose you folks over there will grow wiser by-and-bye. There are dozens of your countrymen over here looking for something to do, and the only difficulty in the way of their getting it is that they don't know how to do anything. Every different branch of industry now-a-days needs a distinct education for itself, and the best trained men always get the preference."

CHAPTER XV.

ARTHUR IS PROMISED AN APPOINTMENT.

THE position of conductor on sleeping cars is not exactly a desirable situation for those who have been reared in the lap of luxury, but when Arthur fully understood that he was really to have such an appointment, and that henceforth he could be an absolutely independent man, life took on a more roseate coloured hue than it had ever yet assumed in the lad's vision. His gratitude to Cora Blanchard and her father knew no bounds, but he wisely refrained from expressing it too freely, as he saw that neither of them desired to hear his protestations of thanks.

The evening was still young when he and Cora strolled out into the garden, leaving Mr Blanchard to dictate letters to his amanuensis.

“ You must come here to lunch to-morrow, after you have made all your arrangements,

and let me hear how things have gone on," said the young lady. "Of course, you must allow me to lend you enough money to keep you going till you begin to get your salary. Father says that you will probably need two hundred and fifty dollars."

"As much as that?" he asked in amazement. "How am I to pay it back?"

"There will be no hurry for you to pay it back. You can return it to me in instalments of ten dollars per month. You will not have to expend the entire two hundred and fifty. A hundred dollars you have to deposit with the company as a sort of security, I believe; but you will receive annual interest on it, and it will be refunded to you when you leave the service. Your uniform costs thirty, and I daresay it will take you another fifty to fit yourself out decently. That makes one hundred and eighty. The remaining seventy you should keep as a reserve fund for your daily expenses till you receive your first pay. Am I not a good business woman?"

"You are everything that is good—angel, business woman, lovely girl, everything. I feel like an ignorant, commonplace clod-hopper in your presence. You have made

me so ashamed of my helplessness, my gloomy ponderings, and my lack of independence."

"You needn't be that! As the twig is bent, so the tree grows. You have been bent all the wrong way, and before it is too late I am bending you straight again. You are a fine oak sapling which will grow into a great tree, if you are properly trained and kept out of the way of any crushing storms. Instead of being raised in the sunlight of true Christianity, love, and humanity, you were brought up under the gloomy clouds of an intolerant, narrow-minded, forbidding ecclesiasticism."

"That's just exactly it, Miss Blanchard, but I could never have put it in that pungent manner. When I was a tiny boy I had already learnt to look upon death as an entrance into a black hole where eternal torture was dealt out to every one. It seemed then so impossible to do anything right. Why, even if I upset a cup of milk over my clothes, I was taught that little boys who did that always went to Hell."

Cora laughed merrily.

"Yes," she said, "there have been

people who have ruined their children's minds by such teachings. But, mind you, I am not an enemy of religion. I am only an enemy of those who make religion a torture, who do cruel and unnatural things in its name, and who are unable to point out one sunny spot in this life or a ray of hope for the future."

"You are hitting both my uncle and tutor there."

"No doubt of it! But remember they are two in a hundred thousand; there are few like them. At the same time, they have the misfortune to believe what they teach, and probably they try to act conscientiously up to their belief."

"For the sake of other fellows, I hope there are few like them."

"Look here! You see what a kind and devoted father mine is?"

"Yes."

"Well, can you imagine him taking me and throwing me into the kitchen fire, and holding me there till I was burnt to death, because I had vexed him in some trivial matter?"

"Good gracious, no!" said Arthur, laughing outright.

“Well, then, if our earthly fathers don’t do those things, you can bet our Heavenly Father doesn’t. Those are my doctrines. However, this is not a theological college, and I am not a divinity lecturer, so we will say no more about it. I only advise you to forget altogether that you were ever taught such things.”

“It has no effect on me now. I have completely overcome any feelings it ever aroused.”

“That’s right.”

Then she fumbled in the pocket of her dress, and presently succeeded in extracting therefrom a roll of paper money, which she handed to Arthur, saying,—

“Here are two hundred and fifty dollars. That will enable you to enter the service of the Pullman Company with comparative comfort and without obstacles. You can repay it in instalments out of your salary, or out of any moneys you may get from your guardian. I shall expect to be kept posted about all your doings, and I shall expect to see you often.”

“May I come and see you when I am a conductor?”

“Not only ‘may,’ but ‘must.’ You have

no choice in the matter. You are commanded to come."

"It is a command which will be obeyed with a glad heart. I suppose I shall not be sent away from Chicago at present?"

"Oh, no! You will probably be given one of the short runs from here, perhaps to St Louis. In that case you would always be in St Louis one day, and here the next, making this your headquarters. After a bit you will probably be put on longer runs, where you will be away three or four days, but you will get a longer rest on your return. When you get broken in you won't mind it, and you'll see a lot of the world, and meet crowds of strangers of every description. You'll find it very different to farm pupilling."

"I am sure I shall, and then there's the satisfaction of making something. For two years I have laboured like a nigger, and paid for being allowed to do so."

"And learnt nothing by it. Of course, you know father's object in putting you on the railroad is not so much to find you a permanent place there, as to give you an opportunity of seeing something of the world. If you get along all right, then he

will soon find you a better berth, but at present it is more necessary to learn something about this country, its customs, its businesses, and its people, than anything else. You will be astonished at the expansion your mind will have undergone after you have been a railroad man for a year."

"I daresay I shall. There is only one drawback. I do want to find out if Vie is all right."

"You shall! I will undertake to ascertain for you whether she is still at her former home, or if anything has happened to her or her mother."

"How?"

"Simply by putting the matter into the hands of a well-known detective agency, who will write to their agents in London, giving them full particulars of what we want to know, and instructing them to find out at once. It will be a very simple and inexpensive proceeding. As the agency I speak of is always employed by the railroads, and by the bank with which father is connected, as well as by his pork-packing business in Kansas City, they will take particular pains about anything they do for us."

“It’s awfully kind of you. I suppose they’ll send a man down from London to River Lawn?”

“Yes, one of their men will go there and call at the house, and if your Vie has left, he’ll make inquiries as to when she left, and where she went to. He’ll find out everything for you.”

“I’d like to go, myself.”

“You’d be a great idiot if you did.”

“I have no idea of doing so—at least, at present—but I cannot help feeling a longing sometimes to see again the only face, and hear again the only voice that cheered me in the dark days of my youth.”

“Keep up your courage, my young friend, and let no sentimental longings interfere with your prospects or your resolutions. You will find yet that the goddess of fortune really helps the brave and those who help themselves.”

“Please don’t think I am wavering. I only said I’d like to go. I daresay I am as brave as most men.”

“I daresay you are, but remember that

‘*None but the brave deserve the fair,*’

and if your Vie is so very fair, you must be doubly brave to deserve her.”

Arthur looked at his companion admiringly, but made no response for a minute or two. She seemed to be half serious and half in fun, and rather inclined to tease him.

He could not help contrasting her with the little girl he had left behind at River Lawn, and comparing the extreme innocence and unsophisticatedness of the latter with the acute perception and wide worldly knowledge of the former, while, at the same time, he registered them both in his mind as women far above all others of their sex.

“Shall I write down the name and address and what I desire to find out, and give it to you?” he asked, after a few moments’ pause.

“Yes,” she said; “write it down plainly, explicitly, and briefly. Then father shall give it to the manager of the agency with instructions that he will have it looked into at once. In four or five weeks you will have received whatever information has been obtained. And now, I am going to dismiss you, for I have got to dress for a ball. Remember, you come to luncheon after you have been with father to the Pullman office, and he has seen your companions. Good-bye.”

She extended her hand towards him, and he raised it gently and pressed it to his lips—not

with the passionate ardour of a lover, but with the delicate respect and light touch of a courtier to his queen.

And, indeed, as she stood there on the green velvety turf, arrayed in a pure white satin gown, with a necklace of pearls wound three or four times round her throat, her luxuriant hair glistening in the light of a half-moon, her extended white arm, from which a wide open sleeve hung like a drooping cupid's wing, looking like tinted marble, the soft dignity and winsome grace of her attitude were equal to anything ever seen at the Tuileries or Windsor Castle.

“ You're coming on, young man,” she said, with a bright smile that showed an excellent row of white teeth ; “ methinks a true courtier has been rescued from the plough.”

Then she gave him a parting nod and returned to the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR BLANCHARD INTERVIEWS THE RUNAWAYS.

ARTHUR VALLANCE was waiting in the hall of the Pullman Company's big building when a light Victoria, drawn by a pair of dark brown horses stopped opposite the door, and Mr Blanchard alighted from it and walked briskly towards him.

"Glad to see you're punctual, my young friend," said the millionaire, cordially shaking hands with him. "Punctuality is one of the elements of business success. Never keep a man waiting."

"Oh, I've been here a quarter of an hour," was the reply; "I took care to be a little ahead of the time."

"Quite right. Come along. Let's take the elevator."

They crossed the hall, entered the lift, and, a few seconds later, were at the office of the general superintendent.

"In New York," was the reply of the clerk

to Mr Blanchard's inquiry for the chief executive officer of that gigantic monopoly which, throughout the entire United States, Canada, England, and a great portion of Europe, furnishes sleeping and drawing-room car accommodation to the weary traveller.

Mr Blanchard turned and, followed by Arthur, re-entered the lift and was taken up to the next floor, on which was the divisional superintendent's office for the Western Division.

Better success greeted them here, for the railway king was at once shown into the private room of this official, Arthur being left in an adjoining apartment to await the result of the interview.

In about ten minutes a bell rang, and the clerk who responded to it returned and invited Vallance to come in.

“So you wish to become one of our conductors?” said a pleasant-faced little fat man with a very heavy light brown moustache, and a very bald head, who was standing near an open window fanning himself with a huge palm leaf fan.

“Yes, if you can find room for me,” was the reply.

“I guess we can arrange it. Mr Blanch-

ard has given me a brief outline of your career. Rather a curious story, but I fear there are a good many similar to it. I suppose you want to go to work at once?"

"Oh, yes," interposed Mr Blanchard, "let him get to work at once, the sooner the better."

The little man left the window, and, sitting down at his writing-table, touched a bell that stood at his elbow.

"Tell Mr Hart I wish to see him," he said to the clerk, who popped in almost before the sound of the bell had died away.

"Mr Hart is district superintendent of the district to which I shall first send you," he added, turning to Arthur. "You will find yourself much perplexed by the number of superintendents we have. First, there is a general superintendent, who is a very big gun indeed ; then there are four divisional superintendents, who are also big guns, but not quite so big ; then there are again quite a crowd of district superintendents. The territory of the United States over which we run our cars is divided into four divisions, each being governed by a divisional superintendent, and these are helped by a system of subdividing their divisions into districts, which are looked after by district superintendents

“What an immense concern it must be,” said Arthur, who had hitherto had no idea of what an enormous corporation the Pullman Company is.

“After you’ve been with us a little while, you’ll see what a size it is. You know that we have a town of our own called Pullman, where we build all our cars?”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“You Pullman people are always bragging,” interrupted Mr Blanchard, laughing; “it does us railroad men good to come round here and listen to you sleeping-car men talking as if the sole constituents of travel were Pullman sleepers. Engines and rails count for nothing in this building.”

“We are the people who have raised travel to its present state of comfort and luxury,” returned the divisional superintendent; “and there are hundreds of thousands of people who would rather stay at home than ride on your roads if they didn’t have our cars to ride in.”

Further argument on the subject was prevented by the entrance of Mr Hart.

“Mr Hart,” said the divisional superintendent, “here is a friend of Mr Blanchard’s, whom I have just appointed conductor. I am going

to put him under you at first. Let him run on the Rock Island between here and St Louis. Give him an order for his uniform this morning, and while it is being made, let him make a trip with another conductor, to be broken in."

"All right," replied Mr Hart. "I am short of conductors, anyhow, even with this one. You see you have 'laid off' two of my men this morning."

"There are plenty waiting to be appointed. I suppose you have some applications yourself?"

"Oh, yes. I was only going to wait and see if you wished to send any one."

"Wait a minute," said Mr Blanchard; "give me the refusal of an appointment for about an hour?"

"Certainly; for all day, if you like."

"No; I'll let you know in an hour or two. I'll send my candidate round to you with a note."

"Very well, I'll expect him."

Mr Blanchard and his young *protégé* then bid good-morning to the divisional "chief," and accompanied Mr Hart to the latter's office.

Here Arthur deposited his hundred dollars, in compliance with one of the regulations of the company, received an order upon a tailor

for his uniform, was presented with a book of rules, a punch, and other conductor's paraphernalia, and was enjoined to present himself at the dépôt of the Rock Island Railway punctually at nine o'clock that evening.

"That's all settled satisfactorily," said Mr Blanchard, as he stepped into his victoria, and motioned Arthur to sit beside him.

From the Pullman building they were driven to the hotel at which the runaway farm pupils had taken up their abode. It was only about three minutes' drive, and there had been little time for conversation when the carriage pulled up at the door.

"Well boys," exclaimed the millionaire quite cheerily, as he strolled into the room where all the young fellows were awaiting his arrival. "What sort of a pickle is this you're in?"

"Rather a bad one, I fancy," answered Fred Summers. "We were just discussing the advisability of going out to sing in the streets 'we've got no work to do, and we've got no bread to eat.'"

"Which would not be strictly true just yet, anyhow," was Mr Blanchard's answer.

Then he glanced inquiringly at each of the lads, and seemed to be taking mental notes of

their various countenances. Little Phillips especially attracted his attention.

"You're a likely looking lad," he said ; "suppose that you were offered the choice of being sent home or of being given a position that would support you here, which would you choose ?"

"I don't want to go home. I want to get something to do here if I can," was the boy's prompt reply, given without a moment's hesitation.

"You are almost too young to have learnt any kind of business yet," said Mr Blanchard ; "but I suppose you know something about figures, and that sort of thing. You look bright."

"Oh, yes, I've done a good deal of arithmetic and algebra, and so on."

"Very well, come to my office at the Chicago and South-Western Railroad Depôt this afternoon, and you shall have an appointment in a bank. Your salary will be small at first, but it will support you. If a few of you live together, you can live cheaper."

Turning to Harry Summers, he found that that young man had no desire whatever to return to England, so he gave him a note to the divisional superintendent of the Pullman Com-

pany, and asked that the bearer might have the appointment of conductor, of which he had begged the refusal for an hour.

“I am a little puzzled about you,” he said to Fred Summers. “The Pullman people might think you just a trifle too young for their service yet, but I’ll find you a position somewhere within forty-eight hours.”

Without waiting for any reply, he inquired what the other four boys desired, and found that they all wanted to go back to England. Farm life in Dakota had so sickened them of America that their most earnest wish was to get out of the country as soon as possible.

“The British Consul must help you, then,” he said; “if he doesn’t, I will, but it is more proper that he should do so.”

“When we saw him, he said that he had no fund for returning belated English boys to their home,” said Fred, “but that he would see what could be done.”

“No, it isn’t likely he’d have a fund, but in a case like this, it is in his power to help. He need only lay the matter before the British residents here, and he would get enough subscribed in twenty-four hours. I’ll write him a note, and ask him to give it his attention,

and I'll send him a bit of a subscription towards your fares at the same time."

"Perhaps he will be afraid to start a subscription to send them home without their fathers' knowledge or consent," suggested Fred Summers.

"Do you think he would prefer to see these lads starve, in order that he might consult their parents' wishes?" asked Mr Blanchard. "Do you think I care a quarter of a dollar whether their parents want them back or not? They had no business to send them out to that thieving rascal. If the Consul doesn't send them back, I'll do it myself, and send a man to New York to put them on board ship. That's the sort of a man I am."

"He might cable to them," said Arthur.

"He might," replied Mr Blanchard, "but to what purpose? To give their parents a chance of shifting the burden of providing for these lads on some one else's shoulders. Not a bit of it; let them go home now if they want to. If they wanted to stay, it would be different."

And so it was decided that representations should again be made to the Consul, and that he should be urged to adopt some measure which should result in the return to their homes of these four English youths.

This having been decided upon, Mr Blanchard, after a few minutes' conversation with the lads, took his departure, first telling Arthur to go at once and see about his uniform, and inviting Fred Summers to call upon him at his offices in the afternoon of the next day.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEED OF A NEW PASSION.

IT was nearly luncheon-time when Vallance left the tailor's where he had been measured for his uniform, and proceeded in the direction of the Drexel Boulevard. That eminent friend of the poor man, the modest tram-car, now stood him in good stead, and, for the trifling sum of ten cents, conveyed him speedily to within a few hundred yards of the Blanchard mansion.

“I read satisfaction and success in your eyes,” said Cora, as she received him on the lawn behind the house, to which charming spot the hall-porter had been directed to show him.

“Yes,” said Arthur; “success has attended me this morning. Your father is a perfect magician. I have often read and heard how difficult it is to get any decent occupation nowadays; but he only has to say, ‘I want a

position for a young friend,' and he has it. Indeed, at the Pullman offices, I believe they would have given him a dozen positions if he had asked for them, and regarded as a favour his asking for them."

"That is what we call 'influence.' If ever you rise to be a millionaire and a president of railroads, you will find you can do the same."

Which verifies a favourite quotation of my uncle's: '*To him that hath shall be given, and to him that hath not, what he hath shall be taken away.*'"

"On the contrary, it does nothing of the sort, for there was a time when, as a little boy, father had absolutely nothing. He had not, and yet to him much has been given."

"Including even a beautiful daughter."

"I think, young man, the change in your fortunes is making you frivolous. Let us talk business. What has been done about your friends?"

Arthur related to Cora all that had transpired at his hotel, telling how Harry Summers had also been made a sleeping-car conductor, and young Phillips had been given a post in a bank, and adding that Fred Summers had been promised a position within forty-eight hours.

“ Did father arrange about the money your friend Summers will require for his outfit and the hundred dollars’ security ? ”

“ No. I don’t suppose he thought about it.”

“ I expect he left it to me. I’ll lend it to him on the same terms I lent it you. It is no use to obtain a position for him unless we give him the means of accepting it. Isn’t that logic ? ”

“ I should think so ; but still it seems to me that there is no limit to your generosity and kindness.”

“ You can’t tell about that. I do like doing these little things, I admit ; but then they involve absolutely no sacrifice, and therefore deserve but little credit. It is so easy to be guilty of little generosityes when one’s father is worth millions.”

“ I daresay it is, but still even under those circumstances generosity is not a universal virtue.”

“ No ; because we get so selfish and enter so little into the affairs of those who are worse off than ourselves. It is the poor man who deserves credit for his honesty and generosity, not the millionaire. In spite of all the little liberalities with which I am credited, and the numbers of donations I give to different charities, at the end of the year I have never

been so much as deprived of a slice of sponge-cake on their account."

" You are under-estimating the services you render."

" No ; they are very paltry. When Sam Hicks pressed that twenty dollar bill into your hand, he performed a greater act of generosity than I have been guilty of, because it is probable that he really was denying himself something when he was parting with it.'

" That was noble of him. He had a very large heart, but he was so quaint ; every one would like him. Still, in every respect but his kind heart, he is the very opposite to you."

" He need be none the worse for that. Now, in your new profession you'll meet every class and every description of man and woman, and I daresay you'll often find your patience greatly tried to get along with them. You'll find blustering, uncouth creatures who will want to domineer over you, and will try to snub you. Don't submit to it. Always stand up for your rights as a man, and the equal of every other man."

" That I always shall. The days of snubbing and oppression are past for me."

" Quite right. Stick to that resolution. You'll also often meet with fidgets—petulant

women, who will worry you with their complaints, and will threaten to report you if you fail to remedy every little defect they think they perceive. Pay no attention to them."

"How do you know all this?"

"From father, and from observation. Remember, whenever father travels over the line or goes anywhere, I always go with him. It is true we go in our private car, but we often spend a good deal of time in the Pullmans during the day, just for the sake of seeing the people."

"If passengers make complaints, doesn't it go against one?"

"Not a bit, unless it be something very serious. Your conduct on the road is generally pretty closely watched, and as long as you're going on well; any trifling complaints against you will only find their way to the waste-paper basket. Father says that ninety-five per cent. of charges against officials on his road are frivolous and foolish, and receive no notice whatever. Come into luncheon."

They entered the house, and, proceeding to a small room near Cora's boudoir, sat down at a round table, laden with all the delicacies that the Chicago markets could produce."

"This room," said Miss Blanchard, "is my

luncheon room, where I entertain only my young lady friends. When gentlemen come to luncheon we always use the dining-room. In your case, you see, you are being treated as a specially-favoured guest. We lunch here *tête-à-tête*, and it is one of the rules of this room that everything is placed on the table at once, and that there is no servant to wait. So please assist yourself to anything that takes your fancy. First of all, give me some of that chicken mayonnaise."

Arthur did as requested, and then helped himself. There was something very novel to him in this mode of having luncheon, and something decidedly pleasant. The table itself was a sweet and charming picture, being ornamented with numerous vases of all shapes and makes, filled with exquisite flowers, which perfumed the air with their delightful fragrance. The china was of a delicately-tinted hue, every piece of it bearing the Sèvres mark, while the room itself was what Cora's friends often termed it, "a dream of beauty," the furniture being upholstered in a light pink satin, and the walls and carpet harmonizing. Through the open window came a soft southerly breeze which gently fanned their cheeks, while the closed outer Venetian shutters excluded the bright

glare, making the room seem doubly cool and pleasant.

The scene seemed to awake in Arthur some new and agreeable sensation, for when, after his eyes had roamed round the room and over the table two or three times, they lighted upon the face of his companion, a softening expression entered into them which had not been visible there before.

“This is lovely,” he said, enthusiastically ; “to be surrounded by such beauty as this ; to have all these things at command, is to live. This is a paradise, and you are its angel.”

“You’re coming on, young man,” she replied, with a smile and a slight shake of the head ; “you may not see many parades like this, but you will come across lots of angels far superior to the one that makes its home here, and if you progress at the rate you are progressing now, you will be capturing some of their gentle little hearts. And then, what about your *Vie* ?”

Something brought the colour to his face at the mention of Violet, but, drawing from his pocket a folded slip of paper, he handed it to Cora.

“Those are the particulars about her which you told me to write out,” he said ; “I have

merely put her and her mother's name, their address, the nearest station to River Lawn, and stated that I want to know whether they are still living there, or, if not, when they left and where they have gone to."

"That is quite enough. I will see that we get what information is to be got at once," she answered, taking the paper and laying it on the table.

Then she changed the subject again, and beguiled him into talking about other matters, and into taking an interest in his more immediate surroundings.

"Look here," she said, when they had quite finished luncheon, and he had several times betrayed the densest ignorance of the most elementary subjects in connection with the country which now seemed likely to become his adopted land; "there are two or three things you certainly must do, for you are real green. You must carefully read our daily papers and make yourself acquainted with our every-day life, our politics, our constitution, our social conditions, and our history. Make us a study, as it were, for a time, and always be posted about what is going on all over the world. Never be local. Take the same interest in Edison's latest invention

that you would take in a general election in England. Throw aside your insularity, and chuck *gaucherie* to the winds."

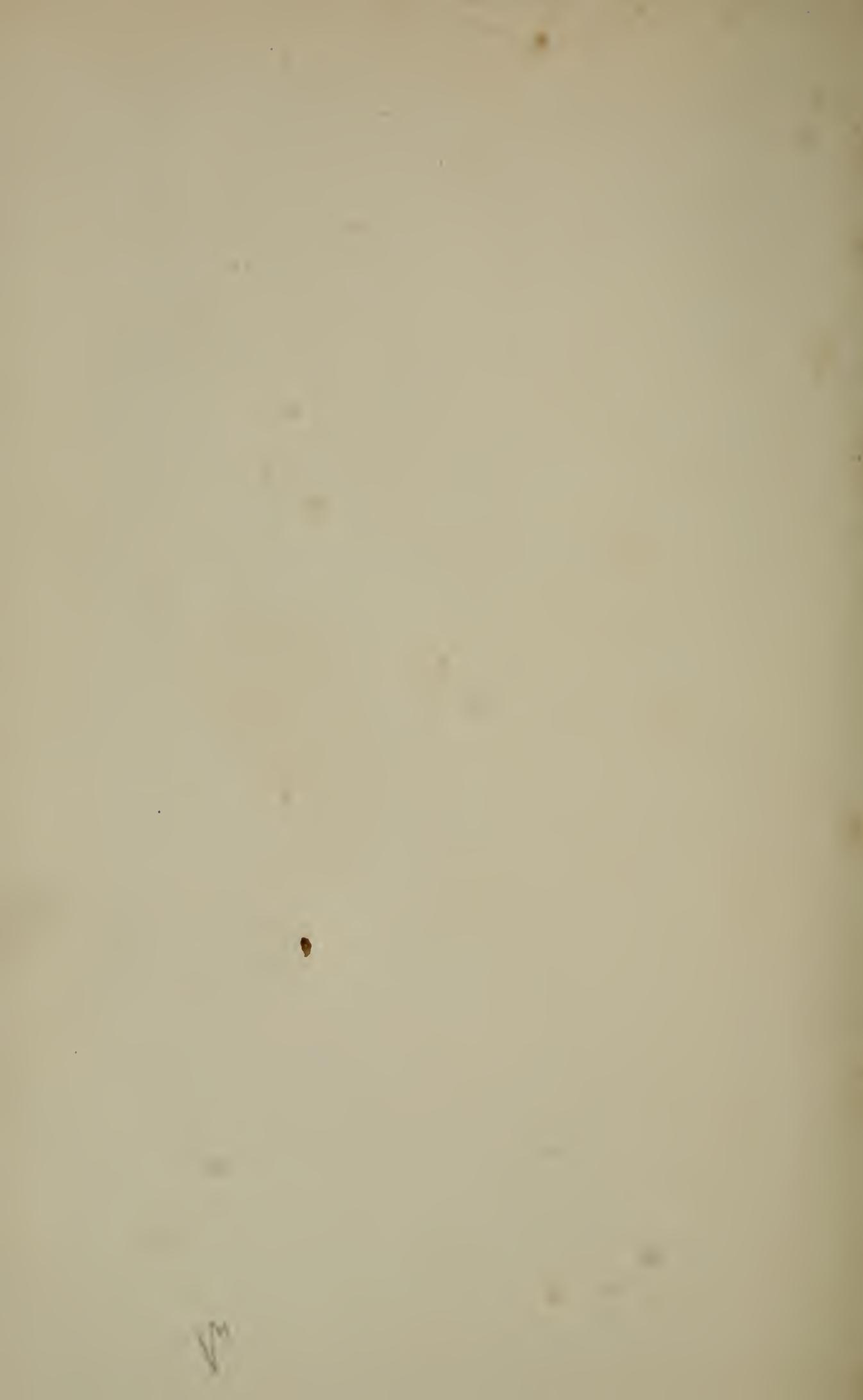
He promised to follow her advice, and at the same time reminded her that it was the isolated life he had led, and the narrow confines within which his mind had been held prisoner, that made him appear so *gauche* and green to one who knew the world as she knew it, and held such liberal ideas as she held.

"I know that," she answered kindly; "but you have broken those bonds now, and your mind is free to develop itself. There is something in you that tells me you possess all the qualifications necessary to success—the ability, the pluck, the endurance, perseverance, and resolution—and remember, that wherever you are, whatever you may be doing, I shall always be taking the same interest in you I take now, and any backslidings or false steps will greatly disappoint me. There, that is all I have got to say. From the way I have lectured you, one might think I was in training for a Salvation Army lass."

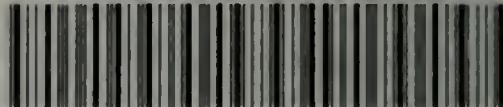
Arthur declared that all her advice should be faithfully followed, and that she would soon be satisfied that such was the case.

And, by-and-bye, when it was time to say adieu, and she once more held out her hand to him, he raised it deferentially to his lips as he had done on the previous night, but in the kiss which he pressed upon her fingers there was this time blended with the homage a courtier might pay to his queen, a tinge of the ardour with which a lover might caress the hand of the object of his admiration. It was almost as if the seed of a new passion had been sown within him, and was just sprouting.

END OF VOL. II.



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